CLASS 224 BOOK J 76

NORTH-WESTERN COLLEGE
LIBRARY

Accession No. 16523 Date May 1922

Given by A Friend

Clara L. Pfaehl Librarian

16523 224
J76

Jordan
Prophetic ideas and ideals.

North Central College Library
NAPERVILLE, ILL.

Books, except reserve books, may be kept one week, with privilege of renewal for like period, unless otherwise specified by librarian.

Five cents is charged for each day a book is kept overtime.

Reserve books may be drawn one half hour before closing and are due one half hour after the next opening of the library.

Five cents is charged for each hour a reserve book is kept overtime.

/224J76>C1/

16523

G-R29

Date Due

DE 12 87
NO 10 70
MY 18 '71
MAR 13 1978
MAR 06 1983
12-1-88
MAR 12 1989
OCT 22 1990
NOV 15
NOV 10 1994
OCT 27 RECD
MAR 15 2004
MAR 0 8 2005

Demco 293-5

PROPHETIC IDEAS AND IDEALS

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/propheticideasid0000unse

PROPHETIC IDEAS AND IDEALS

A

SERIES OF SHORT STUDIES IN THE PROPHETIC LITERATURE OF THE HEBREW PEOPLE

BY

W. G. JORDAN, B.A., D.D.,

PROFESSOR OF HEBREW AND OLD TESTAMENT LITERATURE IN QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY, KINGSTON, CANADA

Chicago New York Toronto

FLEMING H. REVELL COMPANY

London and Edinburgh

COPYRIGHT, 1902,
BY FLEMING H.
REVELL COMPANY

October

CHICAGO: 125 NO. WABASH AVENUE
NEW YORK: 158 FIFTH AVENUE
TORONTO: 25 RICHMOND STREET, W.
LONDON: 21 PATERNOSTER SQUARE
EDINBURGH: 100 PRINCES STREET

CONTENTS

		Page.
I.	Introduction. Prophetic Literature and Preaching	7
II.	The Prophet's Defence (Amos.)	17
III.	The Prophet's Comprehensive Word—Mercy (Hosea vi. 6.)	29
IV.	The Twofold Sympathy of a True Prophet (Micah i. 1-9.)	45
V.	The Prophet's Call or the Vision of the King (Isaiah vi.)	57
VI.	The Prophet's View of Faith (Isaiah vii. 9, xxvii. 16.)	71
VII.	The Prophet as Statesman (Isaiah vii., xxviii., xxx.)	83
VIII.	Prophetic Fellowship or Unity and Individuality (Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah.)	97
IX.	The Prophet as Disciple (Zephaniah.)	111
X.	The Prophet of Vengeance (Nahum.)	121
XI.	The Prophet's Questionings (Habakkuk.)	131
XII.	The Prophet's Presentation of God's Plea (Micah vi. 1-9.)	141
XIII.	The Prophet's Kingly Ideal (Micah v. 2-4, Isaiah xi. 1-9.)	155

16523

CONTENTS

		Page.
XIV.	The Prophet as a Failure. (Jeremiah xviii. 18-23.)	163
XV.	Aspects of a Prophet's Life. (Jeremiah.)	179
XVI.	The Prophet as Priest. (Ezekiel.)	193
XVII.	The Prophet's Parable. (Isaiah v., xxviii. 23-29, Ezek. xv.)	211
XVIII.	The Prophet's Message of Consolation. (Isaiah xl.)	223
XIX.	The Prophet a Preacher to His Own Age. (Isaiah i., xl.)	233
XX.	The Prophet's National Ideal. (Isaiah xli.)	243
XXI.	The Prophetic Missionary Idea. (Isaiah ii. 1-4, xlii. 1-4, Micah iv, 1-4.)	253
XXII.	The Prophetic View of Suffering. (Isaiah liii.)	265
XXIII.	The Prophet as Church Builder. (Haggai i., Ezra iii.)	277
XXIV.	The Prophet's Promise of Peace; or, The City Without a Wall. (Zech. ii.)	289
XXV.	The Prophet and Social Problems. (Malachi.)	301
XXVI.	The Prophet's Protest Against Smallness. (Jonah.)	313
XXVII.	The Prophet of Judaism. (Joel.)	327
XXVIII.	The Prophet's Confidence; or, The Changing Form and the Eternal Life (Haggai ii. 6, Hebrews xii. 27.)	337
XXIX.	Conclusion. The Ancient Prophet and the Modern Preacher.	353

PREFACE.

The present volume claims to be considered as a series of suggestions, not as a complete system of prophetic theology, or even as an outline of such a system. The chief aim throughout is expository rather than critical or apologetic. An attempt has been made to give specimens of popular expositions based upon the most recent study, but as free as possible from technical discussion. Hence the variety in the form of the chapters. In accordance with this plan, it may be one idea, one aspect of a great prophecy that is briefly presented (xiii, xxii), the life and ministry of a great prophet that is sketched (xiv), the contents of one small book may be paraphrased (xxv), or the leading thought of another investigated (xxvi). The arrangement of the chapters will suggest to the student the author's views concerning the course of Israelitish history and the development of Hebrew theology; this, of course, could not be formally presented or fully discussed. But it is hoped that there is sufficient unity in the midst of all this diversity to show that the various themes represent closely related parts of one great whole, incidents in one of the most remarkable spiritual movements. The prophetic movement is one of the most important lines of the great Revelation and through the reverent study of it we come to a larger knowledge of God and man.

The form "Jehovah" has been used throughout to represent the Sacred Name instead of "the Lord" of the English versions; where "Lord God" occurs in the English translation it is therefore replaced by "Lord Jehovah". This seemed the only course open in a book which being meant for the ordinary reader was yet to be kept as near as possible to the Hebrew original. The word "Lord" either in Greek or English cannot in this case be regarded as a correct translation or a satisfactory substitute, and its use gives us a general and somewhat conventional term instead of a name that carries with it the powers of distinct personality and the influence of glorious memories and definite historical associations.

The author desires to acknowledge the kindness of his friend, the Rev. Prof. J. E. MacFadyen, M. A., of Knox College, Toronto, for his assistance in reading the proofs and for valuable suggestions given while the volume was passing through the press.

W. G. J.

INTRODUCTION—PROPHETIC LITERATURE AND PREACHING

"The Old Testament has yet a message, an important message for mankind. Were it better understood and observed, our politics would be cleaner, public opinion purer, and our statesmen more patriotic than we find them."—Extract from a letter to the author, on the occasion of his appointment to the professorship, by the late Rev. Dr. J. Robertson, Superintendent of Home Missions in the Northwest of Canada.

"He who does not know how to transfer himself into spheres of ideas, beliefs, and customs different from those where he has chanced to be born, lives only an imperfect life, lost in the ocean of the progressive, manifold, boundless life of humanity."—Lamennais.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION—PROPHETIC LITERATURE AND PREACHING.

The title of this volume, "Prophetic Ideas and Ideals," indicates with a sufficient approach to accuracy its character and scope. The prophets dealt with are those who have left to after ages specimens of their preaching from which we can form a real, though perhaps in some cases an imperfect, conception of their place in history, and their outlook upon life. The period of their ministry, roughly speaking, may be said to cover a space of three centuries, beginning at the middle of the eighth century, B. C. These three centuries form a most important section of the history of the Israelitish people; the period is politically a time of disaster and decline, but out of national division and distress there come, by the good providence of God, and the faithfulness of heroic men, religious results of rich significance and far-reaching importance. It is not proposed to weave into a system of theology the prophetic contribution to this great movement, but rather to attempt the more modest task of presenting a series of types which will illustrate at the same time the unity of the prophetic spirit and the diversity of its manifestations. The constituency that the author has in

view consists of theological students, youthful ministers and intelligent laymen, who take an interest in the history of their own religion. Many of these chapters have, in substance, been spoken to average audiences, and within that small circle have proved that the lives and words of those distant men may form the theme of helpful discourse to men of today. "Ideas" means that the prophets were thinkers, honestly facing facts and consistently applying God-given principles; "ideals," that they were men of faith, that is, men who, though sharing the common human limitation of having to present eternal truths in the forms of a particular age, were yet convinced that changes of form would not destroy the realities of religion which gave them inspiration and strength. It is a part of the business of the Christian preacher to translate these ideas and ideals into the thought and language of the twentieth century, and so to bring them to bear effectively upon present life.

The main qualifications that the present writer can claim for dealing with this important subject are, first, his interest in the work of the ancient prophets, and, second, his respect for the vocation and ministry of the modern preacher. "Every scribe who hath been made a disciple to the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old." The only way in which the modern preacher can hope to fulfil this description is by having a real fellowship with the great souls of the past, as well as a living faith in God and a sympathetic

comprehension of present needs. It may, of course, be urged that this is difficult; that the times of these men are so distant and their lives so remote from ours; that the words they have left are so scattered and broken, and hence not without painful toil can we even in an imperfect fashion reconstruct their history and get at their point of view. That is true but is there any good work that is not difficult? If the man of science displays his devotion to truth in earnest efforts to reconstruct earlier forms of life, if in other spheres the student of literature and art is content painfully to spell out the meaning of an ancient author, or seeks sympathetically to interpret the symbolism of a great painter, surely the preacher may be expected to give some loving care to those whom he claims as his spiritual ancestors. He has many helps at the present day, but the "helps" of the right kind are precisely those which demand most severe and conscientious work from himself. As a matter of fact, if the divorce between religion and knowledge is not to become real and deep, the minister must be content to accept the fate of the effective workers in any noble profession—that is, he must work carefully through processes which cannot be seen by the mass of people to whom his results are presented. Study must be the joy of his silent hours, in order that his speech may do justice to his deepest life and be helpful to his fellow-men. This is what we expect from the doctor or the artist, and why should the minister be free from the hard universal law? The efficient physician must keep himself familiar with many sciences, but those who do

their work most thoroughly bring the least suggestion of all this severe discipline when they come with a sympathetic smile into the sick room. The artist must study anatomy, but we do not wish him to decorate our walls with grim skeletons; as a rule, his figures are pictures of buoyant health, clothed in the most graceful drapery. Neither is the preacher expected to give lectures on history, to discuss "theories of criticism," or methods of exegesis, but rather to do all that preliminary work so thoroughly that his exposition shall bring the noblest spirit of that past to meet the questioning of the present.

This process cannot be made easy, but so far as we can see it is the only way in which we can show real reverence to men who in their own day were not given to choosing short methods and easy paths. Building monuments to the prophets and forsaking their spirit is a manner of worship which ought by this time to have fallen into discredit among intelligent men. To praise the Scriptures, as possessing the supreme revelation, involves the duty of endeavouring to appropriate the message in its varied forms. In this we have the example of the most faithful and effective teachers in all ages.

This effort to get back to the actual life of men to whom we owe so much can only be partially successful; but the effort itself is both a religious exercise and a means of culture. It is not a mere literary study; such study is only a means to an important end. Farther, it is far from being an unpractical thing, unless for us practical means shallow. What is more living, and in the best sense,

practical than this very effort to break through the barriers of our local limitations and personal prejudices, that we may hold sweet communion with a noble soul of another time or race or creed? The minister whose business is to understand and sympathize with all classes and conditions of men may thus find on the intellectual side of his life a real preparation for those duties which lay the largest strain upon his heart.

At the present day we are apt to pride ourselves upon being "modern," but some who are least modern in spirit are found among those who make this their loudest boast. If the latest century had any distinctive message, if science and theology have united to emphasize any central truth, it is this, that we are members one of another, and the present has grown out of all the past. The obvious lesson, then, is that to understand ourselves we must know the past. This is a truth now recognized in every sphere of science, and it has a deep meaning for the student of religion who desires to realize the glory of his great heritage.

It is not difficult to prove that the Hebrew prophets have a message for our time, but more than any definite message is the spirit that they quicken in the devout student and the atmosphere of fearless faith and courageous hopefulness that they kindle about his life. But for the purpose of making this statement more specific two points may here be briefly noted. The message of the prophets was largely a national or social one; individual piety is implied and the problems of the personal life begin

to emerge; but in the main their address was to the community. The preacher who will try to discover for himself what that message actually was, and will seek to disentangle its essential spirit from the temporary form, thereby prepares himself for dealing with social questions in a sober spirit; he will learn to combine boldness with wisdom, and to express in powerful, appropriate forms the passion for righteousness.

The prophets emphasize the unity of life. In our day there is a tendency to range morality and philanthropy with their allied forms of intellectual activity and beneficent ministry outside of religion, and if this process goes on religion will be emptied of all content and shrivel up into a narrow, barren ecclesiasticism, the very thing that the great prophets refused to recognize as religion. To them the honesty and purity, the kindness and loyalty for which they fought were of the essence of religion, its living spirit and noblest expression. Our life is more complex, it is split up into divisions and compartments of which they in their simpler days never dreamed; but good men still hunger for unity. We wish to know that God is everywhere, and that God is all in all. Religion for us must embrace our philosophy and politics, our worship and work, our personal aims and social duties. Because our Lord Jesus Christ represents for us the divine and human, the mystic communion and practial endeavour, devotion to truth and the pursuit of duty, sonship towards God and brotherhood towards men; because He brings the religion of the spirit, He is the

interpretation and fulfilment of the prophets' message, and in the light of His life we can render to them not a slavish, mechanical homage, but a sympathetic devotion which is both intelligent and free; then the inspiration of the prophets will attest itself to both head and heart, and find new expression as well as more faithful interpretation.

THE PROPHET'S DEFENCE: A MEMORABLE CONTROVERSY

"There is a note of austerity in the terms in which Amos speaks. It is true, the message which he bears is a hard one; but his younger contemporary, Hosea, had substantially the same message to bring; and yet there is a marked difference in the tone in which he delivers it." * * * "With Amos, God is the God of righteousness; he himself is the apostle of righteousness; he is the preacher whose moral nature is moved by the spectacle of outraged right, but who does not unbend in affection or sympathy; on the contrary, he announces Israel's doom with the austere severity of the judge."—Dr. S. R. Driver, "Amos and Joel," page 3.

THE PROPHET'S DEFENCE: A MEMORABLE CONTROVERSY.

(AMOS VII.)

The prophet stands always on the defensive in a world that he is driven to denounce and condemn; but the tragic thing in the situation is that those who reject his message cannot sympathize with his defence. Amos and Amaziah represent two different worlds, worlds that are always in conflict, and that can never understand each other. The courtier, the representative of luxury, fashion and convenience, stands now face to face with a stern, strong man, who is a type of the simplicity of religion and the supremacy of conscience. How can these men, standing at such extreme points, give the one to the other a sympathetic interpretation and fair judgment? Here the prophet and the priest stand in sharp contradiction with their different views of life and antagonistic conceptions of religion. In a certain sense Amos may be said to understand Amaziah, for he measures him, condemns him, and announces his doom. But though this Amaziah is, no doubt, a thin, shallow specimen of his class, it is possible there is

some element in the priest and his sanctuary that the prophet of the wilderness cannot fully understand and interpret. On the other hand, Amaziah thinks that he understands Amos. At the first glance he takes him for one of the common herd of "prophets"; a man who for a morsel of bread seeks to create a sensation, or who by flattery will win the applause of the people. When the indignant herdsman repudiated the insinuation with such tremendous vigour he must have been quickly convinced of his mistake. Amaziah, with his plea of convenience, passes into silence and confusion; but Amos remains a clear sign, an everlasting witness.

A NEW EPOCH.

In these days we are taught not to make our distinctions too deep, our contrasts too abrupt. The warning is needed, and yet there are distinctions which must be made, and contrasts that deserve emphasis. (1) The nation is now about to come into contact with great world-empires, a contact that continued through all the subsequent history, with its Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek and Roman periods, and influenced largely its politics and religion. (2) Here is a new form of literary activity, the writing down of sermons, after their delivery, as a sacred deposit of truth, and an appeal to the future. (3) Behind this new literature there lies a new kind of prophet, and a higher form of prophecy. In Amos, the prophet appears as purely and simply a teacher of religion and a defender of righteousness. He has a clear idea of his vocation; prophecy is not

with him a business or profession; he is a special witness with a definite message. All that we know of Amos is written in this short book; and his teaching stands there open to all. Both the man and the teaching are marked by strength and originality; we can discern the characteristics of a great personality who hears the voice of God and looks upon the world with the eye of faith.

Amos belongs to those who are called pre-eminently "the prophets," and yet he rejects the title (vii. 14). As a matter of fact, there had been bands of enthusiasts, and guilds of prophets that had fanned the flame of patriotism and in some measure kept alive the fire of religion; but around these organizations much greed and impurity had gathered, and this man, rejoicing in the reality of his call, seems to have a stern satisfaction in disassociating himself from them. Yet this is not the whole story; for besides the efforts of noble men, like Samuel and Elijah, there had been also a not unworthy attempt to continue in many ways the great work of Moses. Amos practically says that the responsibility of the nation is increased by the fact that God had never left himself without living witnesses (ii. 11). We have then to describe Amos as a "layman," who receives as his vocation the highest, the essential feature of the prophetic work, that is the call to preach pure religious truth. He did not belong to an organized school, he did not take part in actual political intrigue, he was not a public legislator, or a private professional adviser; he was simply an inspired man in the purest sense. He represents the ideal law, he

demands loyalty towards God and righteousness among men.

This cannot have been an absolutely new thought in Israel; indeed, we know it was not; earlier stories and songs show that the lofty teaching of the Hebrew religion had taken deep root, though it appeared in simpler forms. But it gains here a new emphasis, a deeper meaning and a wider range. The prophet did not claim to be a revolutionist, making a clean sweep and a new beginning. He made a solemn appeal to the past. These two things we learn clearly from the lives of the prophets: First, that not by scepticism is superstition to be fought and conquered, but only by the presentation of positive truth, which quickens a nobler faith. And, second, that the true conservatism is progressive; the only way really to preserve the great message given in the past is by grasping the essential principles that are at the heart of it, and giving them new expression to meet changed conditions and fresh needs. The prophets were not lawyers interpreting a formal law that had reached a final form, but they were in a high sense interpreters, interpreters of a living past, in which God's choice and guidance of the nation had been abundantly proved in peace and war. The prophets preserve the purity and strength of the older faith not merely by denouncing shallow ritualism, or ridiculing foreign fashions and selfish luxuries. This they do with a fierceness and scorn that stand in strong contrast to our fastidious notions of polite preaching (iii. 9-15; iv. 1-3, etc.). But this, while

much needed in their day, is only the negative part of their teaching; its real power consists in the positive presentation of loftier thoughts of God and nobler conceptions of religion.

THE PROPHET'S DEFENCE.

This great task brings the prophet into conflict with popular notions, with vested interests in church and state, and with such professional prophets as are content to represent the average opinion. How then shall a man stand up against a bitter and universal opposition and meet the charge that his new gospel is simply the product of his self-conceit? The answer is that God has spoken to him in solitude, God's purpose has been revealed to him, and he must speak. The doom is coming; the prophet has seen it in vision and prayed against it, but it cannot be completely warded off; the prophet must herald it, and bid the nation prepare to meet its God in judgment. This is the prophet's own explanation of his ministry and defence of his message. To us it is justified by the character of the man and the truth of his teaching. The God-sent vision justifies itself by its contents and its effect upon life. The claim of this man to be inspired by God cannot be settled by any small arguments, though the reasonableness of it may be much more apparent to us than it could be to his contemporaries. To those who believe that a living, intelligent God rules the world, and has given a real revelation of Himself in the life of this favoured people, the message attests itself. For us it is better to appreciate and appropriate it than to argue about it:

the call to set conscience before convention and religion above ritual is by no means out of date.

"Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs;
For I will not hear the melody of thy viols.
But let judgment run down as waters,
And righteousness as a mighty stream."
(v. 23, 24.)

The central thought of Amos is that the God who has called him to speak is a being who, by his very nature, places righteousness in the supreme place. Though we cannot say that the prophet is a "theologian" in the sense of working out a philosophic system, or even of presenting his convictions in a systematic manner, yet we can maintain that he is a consistent thinker and that there is a living relationship between the various parts of his message. What then does the righteousness of God mean to him?

(1) That righteousness is the purpose of the nation's calling; iniquity is not to be excused or slurred over because committed by "the chosen people"; rather the blessings received increase the guilt of those who have misunderstood their meaning.

"You only have I known of all the families of the earth;
Therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities."

This means a reversal of popular watchwords. The people have been fond of talking about "the

day of Jehovah" and "Jehovah of Hosts." Jehovah is a partner in a small concern; they supply Him with sanctuaries and sacrifices, He will give them prosperity and victories. "The day of Jehovah" is coming, which means confusion to their enemies and a glorious time for themselves. The prophet does not throw aside the old words; they are too good to be discarded. Besides, real originality does not consist so much in inventing new words as in breathing new spirit into the old phrases and making them thrill with new life. Sometimes words are so stained with impure associations, or have so completely degenerated into cant, that they must be flung contemptuously away. Probably many such phrases were cast aside by noble men in Israel. Here, however, the prophet infuses new and terrible meaning into phrases that were spoken glibly. Yes, he says, "the day of Jehovah" is near, but it will not be the bright, noisy festival that you are looking for, but something quite different.

"To what end is it for you?
The day of Jehovah is darkness and not light."
(v. 18.)

"Jehovah of hosts" is not a mere leader or patron of the hosts of Israel; He has other hosts in heaven and on earth. These are all subservient to His will and carry out His purpose; that purpose can be expressed in one word, righteousness.

(2) Hence, let the people learn that religion is not luxurious ritual, but real goodness. The wor-

ship that they offered was in name given to Jehovah, but it was utterly unworthy of His nature; it was fit only for some paltry idol and not for the Lord of heaven and earth. When a man of the character of Amos says "Seek good" he cannot mean merely the pleasant or the useful. His word has not the flexibility and fulness of the word "mercy" used by Hosea; but when we think of the man behind it, and his stern loyalty to God, it must mean the real, the true; or, in other words, the people must face the real facts of life and accept the revelation that comes to the sincere seeker after God. From this point of view it would be better to have no ritual at all than to have sanctuaries that were scenes of wicked debauchery. Religion might live in mystic communion with God and display itself in honest dealings. If, however, a church and a ritual are necessary they must be something very different from this impure worship by which God is insulted and man degraded.

(3) Inhumanity and injustice is the worst form of irreligion; and considerations of humanity are not to be limited by any barriers of nation or sect. (Chap. i.) To break these laws of humanity is to outrage the God of heaven. God desires brotherhood among men. Amos is not an emotional man; there is no touch of tenderness in his proclamation of the law. He is not subtle or mystical; there is a grand simplicity about his mind and character, and a definiteness about his teaching that shows the limits of the man as well as the glory of his mission. But even when we recognize his hardness and sharpness, we

marvel at his clear vision, his deep conviction, his powerful penetration of certain elementary truths and facts of religion that need to be constantly restated. And nowhere is this more striking than in the splendid humanitarian teaching of his first chapter. With him this is no effeminate sentiment or mechanical philanthropy or political party cry; it is his simple, stern fashion of setting forth the truth that righteousness and kindness are of the essence of religion; that neither must be forgotten, and that they must not be divorced from each other.

(4) These things are a prophecy; they went direct to the heart of the particular problem of the age, and they contain a message for later times. By their strength and by their limitation they tell of great things to come. Unless the world comes to a standstill and God sends no more men of this or similar spirit, out of the principles here laid down a larger thought of God and a broader view of religion must grow. Such principles cannot be left where this prophet leaves them, they mean more than he has perceived, they are prophetic in the deepest sense. By life more than logic they have come in this form, and in the future they shall be advanced both by reason and experience.

Upon this foundation a nobler kingdom must be built in which the claims of God and the needs of men shall come to fuller recognition. When Amos heard a voice calling him from the flock to speak these noble words it was the voice of ONE who will not be satisfied until He has given to man a more perfect vision of Himself. He is patient and to each

generation gives a new word and guides the men who are seeking to spell out His meaning, until "the fulness of times," when the Son of man shall link their different words into a new and perfect story of Love.

THE PROPHET'S COMPREHENSIVE WORD—MERCY.

"The words of Amos sound like a voice from outside, pealing with the thunder of God's anger and righteous indignation against wrongs and injuries that Amos himself does not feel bound up with. The characteristic of Hosea's book is that the burden of Israel's guilt lies weighty on his soul; he wails, and mourns and laments, and repents with that sinful people. He cannot, without tears in his eyes, contemplate the glorious opportunities that have been flung away. He almost expresses the vicarious involvement in their guilt and carrying of their sorrows. That is the note which gives its exquisite music of pathos and beauty to Hosea's prophecy of the coming downfall of his own land and of his own people."—The late Professor W. G. Elmslie, D. D., Expository Lectures and Sermons, page 62.

CHAPTER III.

THE PROPHET'S COMPREHENSIVE WORD—MERCY.

RELIGION RATHER THAN RITUAL.

(Hosea vi. 6.)

Our Lord has shown us that these words are worthy of our most careful consideration. He gathered up into His great life the highest and holiest aspirations of the ancient prophets; he was the greatest of prophets, and He met the prophet's fate because the Church of His time had not learned the real meaning of this deep saying. That thought should give us pause and lead us to ask whether we have entered into the heart of its mystery. On at least two occasions Jesus Christ used these words in meeting the bitter attacks of fanatical opponents. When He had ignored their hard, selfish distinctions, which magnified convention and caste at the expense of religion, the Pharisees uttered a complaint, and would have made it a crime, that He sat down at the table, in a brotherly spirit, with those whom they classed as "publicans and sinners." His reply was gentle but forceful, and in their view it was, no

doubt, exceedingly presumptuous. It amounted to this: "You misunderstand my mission; I am not a Pharisee, always seeking to guard my own dignity, but a physician whose business is to heal the sick and minister to the sorrowful. But you who profess to have reached finality in your knowledge of truth and your observance of the law, go learn the meaning of this great word, 'I will have mercy and not sacrifice'; do not lose yourselves in petty squabbles, but ponder it in the light of our nation's history and in the presence of your God." (Matt. ix. 11-13.)

When His disciples had broken one of the numerous minute regulations with which the Pharisees had fenced and burdened the Sabbath, our Lord made a great claim for Himself as the Son of man, and laid down the principle that the Sabbath was made for man, to be an inspiring blessing, not a crushing burden. Then he added, "If ye had known the meaning of this, 'I will have mercy and not sacrifice,' ye would not have condemned the guiltless." (Matt. xii. 7.) To infringe their microscopic etiquette was not sin, and even if it must be considered an offence, it was a small thing compared with the carping spirit which delights to say unjust cruel things, in the name of religion. It is a sad thing when, under pretense of great zeal for the maintenance of God's law, men are sundering the sacred spiritual bonds which should bind them to God and man. If this were merely one incident in distant history there would be no need to dwell upon it, but it is still a present danger.

Our Lord's use of this passage shows how His

mind was saturated with the prophetic teaching, how He seized always the essential principles and used them effectively in the controversies that were forced upon Him. Thus in the highest sense he fulfilled prophecy, laying hold of the eternal element, lifting it to a loftier height and giving it a wider range. To us His word is more authoritative than that of the greatest prophet, but the critics of that day did not regard Him with any reverence; to them that word was the daring speech of a youthful self-appointed teacher, a religious adventurer, a man destitute of theological education and ecclesiastical prestige. He did not use prophecy as a mere weapon of controversy, He was not simply sheltering Himself behind an authority which His opponents must recognize; His own life had been nourished at this source, He reverenced the revelation given in the past, He knew that it was His great mission to realize it, and make it a heritage for all men. The Pharisees also professed great reverence for prophets—that is, prophets who had been long dead; they really thought that they would be glad to meet an Isaiah or a Jeremiah, but in actual life they had small faculty for recognizing prophets. Jesus lived in spiritual companionship with the men who had toiled and suffered for the nation's noblest life; He looked calmly forward to the prophet's reward, the cross; and He warned His disciples that the world was still the same, that they must be prepared to suffer for their loyalty to God: "If any man will be my disciple let him take up his cross, daily, and follow me."

HOSEA.

This brings us back to the fact that the man who, more than seven centuries before the coming of the Saviour, uttered these striking words, was himself a rejected prophet, "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." He may be appropriately described as "the prophet of love" and "the prophet of the broken heart." The earlier prophets who spent their strength in guiding social and political movements are not those who bequeathed to us the undying sermons. The man who completely expresses and embodies himself in present movements does not create the highest literature. The life of such a man may be heroic and its story inspiring, but, as a rule, it is not to this class that we owe the words that live and burn through all the ages. The men who have given us the noblest prophecies were men who brought a deeper revelation of God, a loftier ideal of life, which the mass of their fellow-men did not appreciate and would not accept. Strange it seems that the deepest things of life, human and divine, are revealed only to our sorrow and simplicity. At times we think this arrangement unjust, but in our better moments we can say with our great Teacher, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." If good, then also rational—that is, a law of life which harmonizes with intelligence and love. This law is richly illustrated in the life of Hosea; his sorrow was private and public, it concerned the small circle of his own home, and the larger circle of the nation's life. He sorrowed as a husband and as a patriot; through his sorrow he came to a deeper knowledge of God's

love towards His people; out of this knowledge he has given us a passionate prophecy; his utterances may be broken and disconnected, but there is in them a throbbing emotion, a pathetic tenderness, which manifests the divine pity as a great redemptive force. It is difficult sometimes to trace out clearly the connection of his thought, or to discover the exact reference of particular phrases; but the spirit of his ministry may be plainly discerned, and some of his noblest sayings have passed into our religious speech and song, so that he still pleads even with those who have no time for specific study of his book, saying,

> "Come, let us to the Lord our God
> With contrite hearts return."

"THE LOST TEN TRIBES."

The fate of the Northern Kingdom of Israel reminds us again that the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong; or, in other words, in our forecast of the future influence of a man or a people we must not judge by mere appearances. When, after the death of Solomon, the national unity secured by David was lost, and the kingdom broken into two parts, the Northern portion was larger and stronger. The Kingdom of Israel, distinguished now from that of Judah, set out upon an ambitious and apparently prosperous career; it could afford to despise the brother in the South, and sometimes treated him cruelly. For a while Israel had able kings and pursued a successful policy; this kingdom was the

scene of the labours of some of the most famous heroic prophets, as Elijah and Elisha. All this, however, was to come to a sad end, Hosea's heart was burdened with the weight of the coming judgment, and the prophets Isaiah and Micah, who followed him, not only predicted the approaching doom, but also lived to see it realized. In 722 B. C. Samaria was destroyed and the nation that had known such brilliant success was completely shattered. So far as having any share in the abiding life, and higher vocation of the true Israel, these people were lost. Particular individuals were no doubt loyal to the faith of their fathers and friendly to the Kingdom of Judah. The literature of Northern Israel, much of it of the highest quality, has in part been preserved unto this day and by God's providence handed over, as a precious everlasting heritage to the Christian Church; but it has come to us because it was first of all gathered together to be the Bible of the later Jewish Church—that is, of that section of the ancient Hebrew people who survived many shocks of change, and were trained to a faith which made them strong, separate and persistent.

There are people to-day busy seeking "the lost ten tribes," but, alas, their quest is vain; we cannot argue with that fanciful theory farther than to say that seeing the people were not lost in any such mechanical manner as is supposed that method of seeking them is doomed to failure. This nation was lost even as men are lost to-day—that is, swallowed up in the great world's whirling tide, absorbed in the great characterless throng. It is the fate of all weak, characterless people to be swallowed up in

the great stream of life, and most of the Northern Israelites shared that fate. They had persistently rejected such noble teaching as this, and they were driven out into the world before their faith was sufficiently distinct and their character had attained the strength which could stand the strain of being scattered among people whom they resembled too closely. They refused to respond to prophetic influences, they would not grow with their religion, and a nation, like a man, must grow or die. If we are asked then why a great part of the Hebrew race failed of its high vocation, why the great number of Northern Israelites were lost, we can truthfully say that it was because they would not learn this great lesson, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice.." The race, however, survived and did its work in spite of this and similar shocks, and God's word proves its power and persistency even if it is in a way that suggests that God is careful of the type and careless of the single life. That problem we cannot now touch, but this much is clear, the young people of to-day to whom so much high instruction and noble inspiration is available must use the sacred gift on peril of being lost. The young man who does not gain in the storm and stress of life by the action of inward spiritual force, clear convictions and strong character is lost, swallowed up in the great heathen host that ever surges around the true Church of God.

THE PROPHET'S PROTEST.

The prophet's hope did not perish. With his passionate sense of the Divine love he felt that God

must have a people—that loyal souls will be kept through all shocks and storms; so more by love than logic he felt his way, and in his own manner reached out after the great mystery concerning Christ and His Church, and if he was not in a position to proclaim the final truth—"God is spirit; and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." "For such doth the Father seek to be his worshippers" (John iv: 23, 24.)—he hungered after it, and prepared the way for it.

The prophet's complaint was not that the people were irreligious but that their religion was not of the right quality. They were full of zeal for religion, they had many sanctuaries and a showy ritual, their religious festivals were a great success. Priests and prophets who received fat offerings and were well paid for popular teaching thought that all was well. They regarded Hosea as a man too much given to melancholy views, a man driven mad by much sorrow. Did they not pay Jehovah His dues? Would not Jehovah fulfil His part of the contract and strike a great blow? Would He not defend His own home and His own people against outside enemies and foreign gods? That was their argument. Many a rousing sermon, many a popular speech was given on that text. This foolish boasting drove the prophet to despair because he was compelled to recognize the sad fact that people did not really know the God about whom they prated so glibly. What does God care about sanctuaries and sacrifices except as means to reveal His true character and lift men into communion with Himself? Amos went boldly to the most fashionable sanctuary at Bethel

and declared the hollowness and helplessness of such worship: "Prepare to meet your God, seek God in simple goodness, not in vain pomp and foolish show." But Hosea's battle was longer, his wrestling more severe and he found a word of richer significance; his word suggests the love of God, and the loyalty of man. Over against a religion that was showy, sensuous and immoral he set up his ideal of reverence and righteousness, of noble character and consistent conduct.

THE GREAT WORD—MERCY.

This word "mercy" has a long history and a large influence. In its various forms it is used of the grace of God and the godliness of men. In later days and in one of its forms, it was used to designate a party "the godly ones"; that is a dangerous use for any noble word, it may then easily be degraded by men who deal in watchwords overmuch. It is however in itself a rich, sweet word, speaking of kindness, love and loyalty. It is impossible to translate such a word by any one word or phrase; it unites in itself many things which we to-day view as belonging to different spheres. Though we have these things in more highly developed forms we must remember that in the prophet's conception they are really present in seed-form. To the prophet life was one, all the world in which he moved was God's world; and his word "mercy" meant loyalty to God in every part of human life. To us the world is larger and life is more complex, but we need a new synthesis, a bringing together again of all spheres in the name of God; they must all be

lifted up into the light of His love. We speak now of politics, society, art, science, theology, religion, morality, philanthropy, and there is a tendency to regard these as so many separate compartments of the great world or even as so many different worlds. The form of our life is different, but we need the spirit manifested by the ancient prophets to give it unity and power. His word "mercy" may be said to concern religion, morality or philanthropy, it has to do with all because in his view these are only different aspects of the same life. He met a religion that was divorced from morality and philanthropy and he refused to acknowledge that this was a religion in any real sense. He refuses to be dazzled by external splendour; perhaps he was not altogether deficient in the aesthetic faculty, he could, no doubt, enjoy music and other pleasant accessories of worship, but he declines to accept this as a substitute for real spiritual life; in the name of God he cries, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice."

He demands an intelligent trust in God's grace instead of a blind reliance on material sacrifice. Jehovah was the Redeemer of the nation; of Israel it was originally said, "Out of Egypt have I called my son." Sacrifices might have a real use as symbols of the living bond between the God of Israel and His people, but when they were regarded in a coarse mechanical fashion as payment for His protection they became harmful instead of helpful. The prophet was bold enough to believe that religion could exist without sacrifices, but he knew that it could not exist without living faith in a righteous God. The prophet's view of religion was

thoroughly spiritual, though his thought of God may be simple and his conception of the world limited. The word mercy on one side then means loyalty to God as the Father of the nation, the King and Guide of His people. It involves a perception of the fact that the divine blessings are not merely abundant harvests, success in commerce and war, that these may even become a curse, and that there are other and higher ministries. The root of a real religion is in the reverence which recognizes that God must first of all be faithful to His own high character, and that to respond to the stern demands of love is the only worship which yields satisfaction and strength.

The word demands a real morality. Perhaps there were supporters of the popular religion who regarded the prophets as "mere moralists," but in so far as the phrase has any meaning it is not applicable to these great preachers. They never dreamed of such a thing as morality separated from religion, they thought of noble conduct as the outward manifestation of real religion. The man who is loyal to the God of the nation will respect the rights of men. They did not oppose morality to religion; they emphasized the neglected side of the religious life; they held that the religion which, while abounding in festivals and ceremonies, failed to produce political honour, civic righteousness and social purity was by that very failure condemned, as lacking true inspiration and real power. The thing that distressed the prophet was that religion appeared to be popular and plentiful and yet for lack of true religion the social fabric was falling to

pieces. Since that time theology has advanced to deeper thoughts of the sacredness of the solitary individual life, but in order for this to reach its true expression we need to hold fast the truth that we are not a mere collection of atoms, but a living whole in whose varied life religion must find its highest realization.

Hence the word "mercy" calls to a spirit of brotherhood. Piety and patriotism must again be brought into living harmony. Worldly prosperity had ruined the national life in Israel, the old simple ways had departed, and religion had not conquered and moulded the new conditions. The tribal life had given way, the old clan feeling had lost its power; the rich were greedy and cruel; the poor were unmercifully oppressed. The feeling among citizens that as servants of one God they were helpers of each other was weakened. So that the prophet looking out upon the social disorder could say of his brethren that in relation to each other they were "more than kin and less than kind." By "mercy" he did not mean that the rich should pity and patronize the poor, but that all Israelites should stand on the same plane of loyalty to God and each other, that men should be esteemed for their manhood, not for their money; and that the strong should have a brotherly satisfaction in helping the weak.

It needed the life of Jesus to do justice to this great word, to incarnate it in lowly lovely forms. He has gathered it up into Himself that He may breathe it into our spirits; in Him reverence for God and "the enthusiasm of humanity," worship and morality, religion and philanthropy, the deep mystic life

and the true social service are beautifully blended and stand forth forever as the aim and hope of the Church.

THE TWOFOLD SYMPATHY OF THE TRUE PROPHET.

"Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye tithe mint and anise and cummin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law, judgment and mercy and faith; but these ye ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone."

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killeth the prophets and stoneth them that are sent unto her! how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not. Behold your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."—Matthew xxiii. 23, 24, 37-39.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TWOFOLD SYMPATHY OF THE TRUE PROPHET.

(MICAH I, 1-9.)

It is often said that we know nothing concerning these "minor prophets," that to us they are simply strange names from out the distant past. But is this statement correct, and if correct are we not largely to blame? It is true that we do not know much about the circumstances of this man's life, but it is equally true that we may, if we really desire, know much that is important and illuminating regarding his real life. What do we mean by knowing a man? To know many outward facts, and minute details of a man's life is not necessarily to know the man. The clear convictions, strong sympathies, and living hopes make the real man; these forces give energy to his conduct and colour to his character. We are surrounded by many men of whom we know many things, and yet of how many must we confess that they are strangers because we have not gained the clue to the dominant principle of their life. But the writings of a true prophet are a self-revelation; in his very manner of proclaiming God's will the prophet reveals his inmost self.

In those days when names were not mere labels but often had a spiritual significance this man's name may suggest that he belonged to a devout family whose members were loyal to the true God in dark days. That is merely a conjecture, though it is well to remember that to the prophets the play upon the meaning of names was not a trivial thing, it was consistent with their most solemn moods (i. 10-16, vii. 18). Micah, whose name is a shortened form for "who is like Jehovah," was at any rate a zealous champion of Israel's God.

Micah was a native of Judah, the southern kingdom, and lived in the same period as the great Isaiah of Jerusalem, but unlike Isaiah he belonged to the poorer class, and his home was in the country. One is an aristocrat and a courtier, the other is a peasant and has no great love for the cities. To him the two chief cities are the head and front of Israel's offences.

"For the transgression of Jacob is all this,
And for the sins of the house of Israel.
What is the transgression of Jacob? is it not Samaria?
And what are the sins* of Judah? are they not Jerusalem? (i. 5.)

This is not without significance. It might prompt the commonplace remark that God does not limit his choice of prophets to any one class; prophecy can appear in the russet garb of the peasant's speech as well as in the purple robes of the statesman's oratory. Perhaps it is more to

*Greek Version.

the point to call attention to the fact that it is the honest, homely countryman who predicts the destruction of Jerusalem more than a century before the hour of doom arrived (iii. 12). It is thought that belief in the inviolability of the city grew out of or attached itself to the teaching of Isaiah; however that may be there was no such possibility in the case of Micah's preaching. Micah's prophecy or at least the first part of it was delivered before the fall of Samaria, an important event which happened in the year 722 B. C.* His stern denunciations and solemn warnings embraced both Israel and Judah.

It is interesting to note that about a century later this particular prophecy concerning the destruction of Jerusalem was quoted in favour of the prophet Jeremiah, who not only predicted the same doom but also saw its sure, steady approach (Jer. xxvi, 18). This was surely a better use of a text than has often been made under similar circumstances. Too often the ancient document has been used to stifle the living voice; Micah being dead did, in that case, speak to some purpose. This is all the real history we possess, all else is late tradition of quite uncertain character. What is certain is the man's real inspiration, his faith in God, his pity for the poor, his burning indignation against unjust rulers; all this he has written out of his deepest experience; he does not put himself prominently forward in the sense of writing direct autobiography, but he thrust forward his message with all the

*See Chapter III.

weight of his manhood, and in that message we may read his soul.

The question naturally arises, how is it that we possess, in documentary form, the preaching of this zealous prophet and strenuous reformer who exercised his ministry almost three thousand years ago? The answer is that we owe this blessing to a generous providence by which the world is ruled, ruled so wisely that when the chaff supplied by time-serving teachers is swept away much golden grain of true teaching remains. Quite true, but providence acts through human life, so we may with profit and without irreverence carry our question a little farther. There was both writing and prophecy in Israel before the eighth century B. C., but at that period these two things come into a different relation to each other. From that time we receive reports of the great sermons that were delivered, and prophetic literature in its highest distinctive sense takes its rise. Four of the greatest prophets—Isaiah and Micah in Judah, Amos and Hosea in Israel—belong to this period. Why did these men write at a time when the pursuit of literature was not easy, and there was no great circulation of books? It is easy to see that these men are speakers more than authors; it is face to face with the people that they would gladly do their work of denunciation and persuasion. It was not for worldly gain. In those days literature had not become a profession; and indeed in any age it is the exception for poets, philosophers and preachers to receive much recognition for their toil of brain and heart. That is not after all such an evil thing,

seeing that the products of the highest kingdom cannot be paid for in this world's current coin. Neither did they write for fame. Personal reputation and literary fame were not regarded in the same way then as now. No one can tell how many nameless souls have poured their best thought and noblest aspirations into the great stream of literature that we call the Old Testament. So far as we can learn the great prophets began to write down their messages because they were misunderstood and rejected by the people of their own time. Prophets of an earlier age had found it possible to put all their strength into the actual political and social battles of their own age. But while the eighth century is not the beginning of the Hebrew religion, it is certainly the starting point of a higher prophetic movement which makes its solemn appeal to the past and sets its face steadfastly toward a nobler future. The rejected prophets made their appeals to God and to the future time; thus the despised message, the word of the cross, carries down the ages its lesson of warning and hope.

"Now go write it down, and in a book inscribe it,
That it may be for after days a testimony forever,
For a rebellious people is this, lying sons,
Sons that will not hear the instruction of Jehovah
Which say to the seers, see not! and to the men of vision
Do not bring to us visions of what is right,
Speak unto us smooth things, see delusive visions!"
(Isaiah xxx, 8-10.)

Micah had the same faith as Isaiah in the undying

power of truth, and bore the same testimony against folly and unbelief (iii. 5-8). In this section of his prophecy there is manifested something both of severity and sympathy, loyalty to God and pity for man (i. 2-10). We have first a powerful description of coming judgment given by one who sees the storm approaching, then in the eighth verse there seems to be a sudden revulsion, an outburst of personal feeling, "therefore will I wail and howl, naked and barefoot will I go." The prophets do not write or speak as logicians or systematic theologians, but as men whose passion expresses itself in poetic forms; consequently they paint their pictures with strong light and deep shade, the transitions are abrupt, they pass quickly from one mood to another. The startling change is especially instructive in the case of Micah, a man whose mood is grim, whose attacks upon evil-doers are rude and realistic. Read the sublime theophany, study the picture of Jehovah coming to judgment riding upon the high places of the earth, so that the hills are melted and the valleys cleft. How real this is to the prophet, he sees it by the eye of faith, he knows that it must be, because God is righteous; he acquiesces in it and seems to rejoice in it—so strong is his sympathy with the justice of God, but when he realizes all that it means for the doomed land he utters the mournful cry, "therefore will I wail and howl." What is the explanation of the abrupt transition? It is not merely because it means pain to himself, loss and distress to the district in which he lived. "For the wounds are incurable; for it is come even to Judah; it reacheth

unto the gates of my people, even Jerusalem." Neither was it simply grief and personal bitterness that the people have rejected his message and scorned his ministry. That those considerations enter as elements into the case there is no need to deny. Micah, if we take the first three chapters of this book as a decisive specimen of his work, does not seem to be a man of the sensitive emotional style of Hosea and Jeremiah; there is a plainness and roughness about his fibre, but it is just because of this that he shows most clearly that he has grasped the twofold life which is essential to real prophetic ministry: the vision of divine judgment, and sympathy with sin-stricken, sorrowful men. He is on the side of God, through conviction of the divine righteousness he enters into the secret of judgment, but what he sees is so awful that he swings round to the side of men, and goes into mourning for their woe. At that very time it may be that the world is making merry, that the church is gay in her festival attire, and the weird figure of the prophet comes across the scene preaching judgment and manifesting pity. This change from sternness to sympathy is not weakness or inconsistency, it is real prophetic strength; this spirit is the source of power with God, and influence over men; the prophet because he has been so near to God is driven close to the heart of humanity. In the case of Micah with his fierce denunciation of wicked rulers we are in danger of forgetting this, and we may be tempted to think of him as a raving demagogue (iii. 1-3). Hence it is important to emphasize the fact that he has in his own form

that twofold outlook and double spirit which is the essence of the deepest religious experience, the noblest spiritual life. The prophet speaks for God, but he speaks from within the circle of human life, not as a cold outsider. It is not necessary at this point to describe all the faculties and qualities of a true prophet, but we single out this common characteristic feature, faith in the living, righteous God, and such faith as begets deep sympathy for men. The prophets are an everlasting proof of this, that real faith in God does not make men depressing pessimists or cruel cynics; life is dark to men who see judgment coming upon a corrupt and thoughtless generation, but in reality there is hope for humanity and religion behind their most tragic lamentations and most despairing cries.

The prophet is just the opposite of the Pharisee; these two types are separated by the whole diameter of being. One is throbbing with life, he is not careful of appearances if he can only rouse men to think of God and goodness; he has a holy recklessness, a sacred abandonment of self. The other defends a fixed law, a hard dogma, and is supremely concerned for his superficial respectability. We hear of "the high Church," "the low Church" and "the broad Church;" these all have their strength and their weakness, but the Pharisees create what has been well called "the hard Church;" the church that has lost its soul, the church that has no care for the outcasts, no pity for the poor, the church that crucified the Christ.

From this point of view also, it is in our Lord Jesus Christ that we meet the highest manifesta-

tion of the prophetic spirit. He smites hypocrisy, He pours out His hot indignation against pretentious unreality, and then He goes forth to weep over the city that had rejected the prophets. Because He stands so near to God He comes close to the human heart; the divine purity gives strength to the human sympathy. He reveals God's righteousness in such a spirit of love that He can attract the outcasts of society, and make them feel that in the very heart of judgment there is mercy.

This then is the spirit of the true preacher, "commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." Though the matter and tone of our preaching may be in some respects different, the spirit is the same, the preacher is not a mere special pleader for God and law, any more than he is a retailer of feeble sentiment; mercy and justice, strength and tenderness must meet in his presentation of the great Evangel. The man who stands outside of us and in a mechanical manner declares that we are sinners and merit damnation does not move us very deeply. The preacher must see the vision of judgment and in his inmost soul weep over our sins. This can not be put on, it must grow out of the life that has been moved to its deepest depths by the manifestation of God's righteousness and the pressure of human needs. But this is also the spirit of the true Christian disciple; in this sense all the Lord's people must be prophets, then every faithful soul becomes a living link between earth and heaven. Then the battle against impurity in all spheres of human life may be fought with equal zeal and less bitterness. From

the vantage ground of a higher religion and a clearer individual experience we may fight for the civic righteousness, social purity and national brotherhood which was so dear to the prophets of Israel. We must each have our own Vision of Judgment, and recognize the supreme claims of righteousness, if our sympathy is to be effective, and our kindness have redemptive force. Then will our lives be made strong through the righteousness of God, and gentle through the love of Christ.

THE PROPHET'S CALL, OR THE VISION OF THE KING.

"It is the sovereignty or majesty of Jehovah that is his main thought. The conception is singularly pure and lofty. It is a worshipper's thoughts when he draws near to God. The vision is but the service in the Temple transfigured. The prophet fell into a trance while beholding the service and musing on its meaning. Suddenly the house and the service and the ministers became transfigured; the walls went apart, and the roof lifted itself up till it seemed the high dome of God's palace on high under which he stood, and the Lord the King sat upon His throne receiving the adoration of all holy beings. The mental history through which the prophet passed has a singular psychological sequence. And his own experience will be that of his people: the fire of God burnt up the impurity of his lips, and the filth of Jerusalem shall be consumed with a blast of judgment and a blast of burning (iv. 4). Jehovah is a fire in contact with the sin of His people, which must either consume them or purify them."—The Late Rev. A. B. Davidson, D. D., "The Temple Isaiah," xii.

CHAPTER V.

THE PROPHET'S CALL, OR THE VISION OF THE KING.

(ISAIAH VI.)

This chapter is one of the most important in the history of revelation; like a great picture of wonderful beauty and subtle suggestion, it will repay repeated and careful study. The great words of the chapter are heard and spoken in vision, but they cannot be called visionary in any shallow sense; they are intensely practical, they contain the prophet's call, they give the keynote of his life, and sum up in a few striking sentences the spirit and purpose of his ministry. This vision shows us how Isaiah became a prophet, and gives the secret of his strong, consistent career in the words, "Mine eyes have seen the King."

Isaiah seems to have spent the whole, or the greater part, of his life in the city of Jerusalem; for many years he was the most remarkable figure, and sometimes the most influential man in that city. The tribes of Israel had again been broken into discordant division, and Jerusalem was at that time the centre of only a small kingdom; but this man and his band of disciples set at work spiritual influences of great significance for the higher life of the world. Though the Jerusalem of his day was

full of feebleness, folly and wickedness, we can trace in his teaching the beginnings of a new Jerusalem, Zion, the city of the Great King, which shall not pass away. He was a young man when he saw this vision; as he stood at the opening of his great career he was led to look into the heart of things, and to see the real meaning of his life. Probably it was later in his life when he wrote down this statement for the use of his disciples and the service of the Church. Before he committed it to the care of men who loved him and who would cherish his memory, he had often pondered its meaning and proved its power. He remembered that the decisive moment of his life came in the year of King Uzziah's death. When the proud, successful king had been brought low by disease, and had passed under the shadow of death, the young patriot was called to see the spiritual temple and the Eternal King. Life is full of change; high rank and worldly success cannot resist the attack of decay and death; how important, then, for the young man to learn that there is an unchanging kingdom, and a King supreme in majesty and righteousness.

About the time that this crisis came in the life of the young Jew, the city of Rome was founded. The obscure village grew to be a city, the city developed into a State, the Republic spread its power over the Italian Peninsula, then it launched out on a conquering career; it finally subdued the civilized world and came to be a great imperial power. That empire, after centuries of sway and influence, crumbled to pieces and left its varied heritage to the life of mankind; new empires have risen and

the world is called to face new problems. Isaiah's vision remains, and the spiritual kingdom to which it belongs is beginning to be revealed in larger outline and richer fulness. "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the word of our God abideth forever." Distance of time does not destroy our interest in a scene which is a parable of the changeless life and part of the upward movement of God's kingdom.

THE VISION.

This is the only vision of which Isaiah gives a clear and full description; he no doubt had other visions, but this was of supreme importance. He elsewhere alludes to the fact that there were times when he was gripped and subdued by the strong hand of God. (viii: 11.) But the great prophets did not hanker after visions nor boast about them; they did not seek by artificial means to stimulate feverish religious excitement. The great Apostle of the Christian faith tells of one decisive vision at the beginning of his new life; he tells us further that he was constantly meeting with small men who boasted of their wonderful visions, yet that he himself steadily refused to be drawn into that morbid strain. The real test of the vision is the daily life, and no two men can stand that test better than Isaiah and Paul. These two events were of such high importance, because in one case the revelation of Jehovah and in the other the vision of Jesus marked the beginning of a life-work which was to have great and lasting influence on the Church of God. It was a vision and a vocation, a conver-

sion and a call. The visions of youth may be of great things sought for self, of earthly ambitions that are deceptive as well as brilliant. There were many young men in Jerusalem spending their strength in wild revelry or in pursuit of selfish gain, and for them there was no voice of God, no vision of the King. The vision came to the young man in whose life the two vital forces of patriotism and religion were at work. The vision came as a reward for search and an inspiration for service; to the seeking spirit was given the open eye. The deep secrets of experience are difficult to tell, the finest drapery of words seems too coarse to express their mystic meaning. Here surely the Divine Spirit has guided the prophet in his delicate task; the truth in its infinite suggestiveness shines through the noble forms of the picture. This description of a kingly presence, and of the attendant seraphim who chant the sublime divinity and perfect purity of Jehovah, is a reverent unveiling of unseen realities; it is a glorious suggestion rather than a finished picture; it detaches itself from the crudeness and impurity of those dim days and awaits its fulfilment in the words of One who possessed the perfect vision, "Our Father which art in Heaven."

The central fact is the vision of God as King—"Mine eyes have seen the King." You say, no man can see God and live. That is quite true, as we here see, this man did not live; in a very deep sense he died. The vision of God kills that it may make alive; the fire of the divine revelation burns up the dross of pride and passion. The great need of that time is also our own great need, a true vision,

of the divine, a lofty thought of God. This alone can meet the hunger of Isaiah's soul and save the nation from utter failure. The popular religion was crude and impure; many worshipped idols, many ran after a spurious spiritualism or reduced religion to a sensuous ritualism. (i: 11, ii: 8, viii: 18.) That which made a hero of this young man, and gave power to the purest religion of his day, was the force which also nerved our fathers to cast out superstition and fight for liberty; the vision of a God who is supreme, who through His righteousness is really kind, who is revealed in Nature, who rules the nations and who does not disdain the cry of the penitent soul. No argument can do justice to this; it is a vision and a life. The saints and martyrs point to it as the object of their love and the source of their strength. Men of mighty intellect, of childlike heart, of pure spiritual aspiration, have through its inspiration saved the nation from despair and the church from failure. The men who have borne the burdens and fought the battles which helped forward the world's highest life, knew the meaning of the words "Mine eyes have seen the King."

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE VISION.

It brings a true sight of self; youth has restless energy and daring impulse, but can only come to real greatness through deep humility. No man sees himself truly except in the light of God's presence. One of our greatest needs to-day is the need of a deeper reverence; this we cannot learn by rote, and no mere surface ceremony can supply the lack; it can only come through the consuming fire of God's

presence, which with its cleansing, quickening power, drives away our petty pride and foolish frivolity. When that presence is realized worship is not a display nor an entertainment, but a real approach to the eternal throne.

There is a sense of the sin in society which makes a man not a Pharisee, but a prophet. It is easy to be cynical at the expense of our fellows, and to pour out stinging satires on the shams and weaknesses of society; but that is not the dominant spirit of the highest ministry. In the all-searching light of this vision, Isaiah sees that the world in which he lives is full of such shams; speech is a symbol and expression of life, and speech which should be clean and sweet, as well as truthful and strong, is vile and unclean. But the life of sinful people is the life the prophet shares, the atmosphere he breathes, the sphere in which he lives and moves. He cannot flee to the wilderness and leave it all behind. He must be in this world but not of it; this he can be because he has learned that sin is an alien power in himself and in society. It is treason to the divine King; in the name and by the power of the King it can be conquered. Through the influence of this deep revelation he can be a statesman as well as a religious teacher, a social reformer as well as a sacred singer, and through it all a saint. The vision means, then, the possibility of service. If there were no King a man might be content to be a time-server, but to the man who has seen the King the way of highest service is open, and he is "not disobedient to the heavenly vision." Life, then, finds its real meaning in service to God and man.

Behind this man's call to service there are certain great convictions which are a prophecy of, and a preparation for, the rich personal experience which is fully revealed in our Lord Jesus, and quickened in us by the power of His great sacrifice.

To the promise, "Thy sins are forgiven," our Lord adds the call "Follow me"; in a different, but still in a real way the same close connection of two great truths was felt by the prophet Isaiah. Forgiveness and personal cleansing are not the end but the beginning of real religious experience. He has seen a great vision and heard rapturous sounds; can he then flee from the world and be at rest? Can he not find shelter behind the throne and listen forever to the celestial music? No! That is neither the prophetic call nor the Christian life. He who is accepted of God is the one to be sent back to the world of men. Forgiveness means power to conquer sin, and therefore power to help men in their hard struggles; sanctification is not merely the passport to heaven, it is the preparation for highest service. God needs men to speak for him on earth. The cynic says that this is the cry of our self-conceit, and that we might serve God better by silence than by babbling speech. But it is precisely the man whose conceit has been most thoroughly purged out who feels the significance of this statement. The power of heaven is seeking to break through with beneficent influence into the life of man, and its most effective medium is the ministry of faithful men. (Amos iii, 7.) And at last it found its way to the heart of humanity in the form of the Highest Man. "God, having of old time

spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions, and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in a Son." That which redeems a human life from vanity is the thought that God will condescend to use it. The ministry of speech seems, in our unbelieving moments, to be a small helpless thing. To meet this we must look back upon what has been accomplished by those who spoke out of a strong sense of their unworthiness and of the divine helpfulness; their words the world will not willingly let die. There is nothing more wholesome for us when we falter and lose heart than the reassuring voice of one who can say sincerely, "Mine eyes have seen the King."

This high service comes from a volunteer who feels behind him the strain of a great spiritual pressure. The words "Here am I, send me," stand forth as the type of the fullest surrender; they are not the result of man's coaxing and persuasion; they do not represent the slight flutter of a passing excitement; all the strength of this young man's nature and all the inspiration of this vision are behind them. There already slumbered in his soul the faculties of the poet and the natural endowment of the statesman; now that he has the living fire of the prophet, he gains strength to face the foe and to persist in spite of indifference and misinterpretation. The perseverance of the saints presupposes the vision of the saints. In the darkest hour there remained with this man the knowledge that though our sight is dim the reality abides, the King upon the throne of His holiness bringing strength and

progress out of what seems to be the chaos of human history.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE VISION.

A vision in which such clear, strong convictions are communicated must prove a power in the storm and stress of life. It came from heaven to illumine and quicken the prophet's soul; it gave him power to face the people, and the right to speak with kings. He was not a courtier seeking wealth for himself and favours for his friends. He longed to have the throne of Judah established in righteousness, that the visible king might be a true, if imperfect, representation of the divine King; he was indeed the most kingly man of that generation in Jerusalem, because he cherished a lofty ideal and had the firmness of character which comes from God-given principles. In contrast with him Ahaz was vain, sensual, unbelieving; and Hezekiah shallow, feeble, vacillating. Their shifting policies embodied no real principle, but were mere makeshifts, frantic attempts to escape by any means from present difficulties. It is a sad thing when the King on the throne has no kingliness of character, when the ruler manifests the weakness which in its practical effect is as disastrous as wickedness. How would our fathers have met the craft and cunning of reckless rulers; how would they have fought political and ecclesiastical tyranny to gain for us this large place, unless they had caught a glimpse of the heavenly throne and the Supreme King? The power to speak with earthly princes in the name of liberty, truth and righteousness has ever come from the Vision of the King.

From this standpoint the prophet had power to recommend what shallow people thought to be a very strange policy, namely, the policy of "splendid isolation," or, in other words, faithfulness to one's own vocation and supreme trust in God. "In returning and rest shall ye be saved, in quietness and confidence shall be your strength." (xxx: 15.) A great word standing out clear amid the fever and confusion of the time. The "Jingoes" of Judah thought that their tiny kingdom might play a great part on the diplomatic and military stage. In the hour of weakness they craved for alliances which cost them much and yielded little. Isaiah fought against this political folly. He would have the nation keep clear of these costly and dangerous alliances, and stand calmly in the position assigned by Israel's God. You say it is a foolish thing for a paltry little kingdom to attempt to stand alone. But to Isaiah this simply means that the nation must be true to its vocation and faithful to its God. The prophet was beginning to see that the nation must find its strength in its religious life rather than in worldly splendour or political influence. Such preaching must always seem foolish to those who have no faith in God, or even to those whose faith is feeble. If a nation has no strong independent life, no noble national character, it feels loneliness to be terribly oppressive and seeks glittering alliances which are usually showy and expensive but yield little help in the testing time. If a church has little apprehension of the Kingly presence it will seek false stimulants and trust in cunning little contrivances. If a man

has no sense of God's companionship and helpfulness he will be dependent on popular applause or the approval of the great. To be alone without God means weakness, confusion, death; but to feel ourselves grasped by the divine power and embraced by a great divine purpose, means clear intelligence and abiding power. The true aristocrats of all the ages are the sons of God who could say "Mine eyes have seen the King."

We see this in the way Isaiah undertakes an apparently hopeless task. To preach to an indifferent and unwilling people, to prove that, under certain circumstances, the very fulness of truth may be a blinding instead of an enlightening power, this is a great test. (Matthew xiii: 12-16.) Even if we admit the contention of some expositors that the narrative is coloured by the experiences of later and darker days, it is still quite clear that the young man did not begin his ministry with flattering hopes of speedy success. He knew from the first that he was called to what the world regards as failure, to be a preacher delivering a rejected message, a statesman struggling with insuperable difficulties. Let us thank God that no man can realize all the details of the continuous cross-bearing; to meet the actual pains is sufficient without too much torture of anticipation; but let us at the same time rejoice that a man of faith can accept the principle of the cross, that noble men did so before the Christ came to reveal all its richness of meaning. To seek first the kingdom of God, to place principle before expediency, to declare boldly the unpopular truth, to oppose the will of kings and the demands of the

people while seeking their highest good, this in such an age meant the Cross. That this man should accept the prophetic call knowing what it meant is only explained by the fact that he "endured as seeing Him who is invisible." And so through all the conflicts and changes he came to see one thing clearly, that religion springing from the revelation of the Eternal God cannot die; as the light grows the shadows deepen, those who see only the darkness are driven to despair, those who take comfort in empty things preach peace where there is no peace; but the prophet sees both sides of life, the present shame and confusion, and the eternal order which struggles toward clearer manifestation. The movement may be slow, but the man of faith fights the heroic battle knowing that the future is in the care of the righteous God. In dark days the prophet plays well his part; he is a sign that man does not live by bread alone; he who has received the true vision does not lose it, but is faithful in a fickle world. The harsh discords of the world ring round him, but the music of heaven is in his heart; he proves that one true man can represent the kingdom of light and love.

A PROPHET'S VIEW OF FAITH

"Credulity is not Faith. That indolent abdication of the responsibility of judgment in favour of every pretender, that superficial assent lightly given and lightly withdrawn is utterly at variance with the intense clear vision and with the resolute grasp of Faith.

"Superstition is not Faith. To choose for ourselves idols, whatever they may be, to invest with attributes of the unseen world fragments of this world, to brood over shadows, is to deny Faith which is at every moment active, progressive, busy with the infinite.

"Conviction is not Faith. We may yield to what we admit to be an inevitable intellectual conclusion. Our opposition may be silenced or vanquished. But the state of mind which is thus produced is very often a state of exhaustion and not of quickening. Till the heart welcomes the Truth, it remains outside of us."—Wescott's "Historic Faith," p. 6.

CHAPTER VI

A PROPHET'S VIEW OF FAITH

(ISAIAH VII, VIII, XXX. 15-16.)

Isaiah is called the prophet of faith because he affirms so clearly that there is a vital connection between faith and character, believing and living. Later the prophet Habakkuk gives prominence to this truth by presenting it as the answer to doubts and difficulties concerning the government of the world, and by the supreme emphasis which he places upon the statement that the just man shall live by his faithfulness.* In Isaiah's teaching the idea has a fuller development and richer setting; it springs from his central thought of the majesty of God, and it touches the whole round of human life. This great prophet may in a very real sense be called a theologian, not that he works out a formal abstract system, but because he is a great thinker whose teaching is built up into a living organic whole. The great creative ideas hold a central position and stand in harmonious relation to each other, while the practical applications grow out of them in the most consistent manner. Such a living system is presented in beautiful symbolism

*See Chapter XI.

in the vision through which the prophet was led to a consciousness of his high vocation. In this system faith plays a great part as the force that links man to God, and gives real meaning to human life. The highest illustration of this is in the prophet's own life and career, but the prophet had the gift of luminous teaching as well as of consistent living. It is difficult to mark absolutely new movements in the world of thought, and it is necessary to guard against attributing to Isaiah's use of "faith" all the later associations which have gathered round the great word, but when all needful qualifications are made we must recognize in his thinking the originality and spirituality which are the marks of the highest inspiration.

The man of faith according to Isaiah's representation is the man of clear vision and true insight, who sees God as a great King ruling the world in righteousness. Such a man gains a correct view of himself, and sees life in its proper proportions, as a manifestation of the divine majesty, and an opportunity for faithful service. Zion is the dwelling-place of Jehovah which He seeks to make pure and glorious. The people of Israel have received special tokens of favour, and the severe chastisement which awaits them is a manifestation of righteousness, which, if rightly received, will prepare the way for mercy. Thus while the man of faith is a real patriot and makes the character and destiny of his own people the starting point of his thought concerning God's government of the world, he treats this in such a noble spirit of religion, and gives such a broad view of morality that there is in his

thought the promise of real progress. The great truths that are revealed in a many sided fashion in the Old Testament came by way of the living experience of men who were ever seeking to understand more fully the meaning of loyalty to God. Faith meant so much to Isaiah because in his own way he thought of the life of God as seeking to express itself in the life of man. Out of such insight there grows lowliness and reverence. Nowhere is the majesty of God so splendidly expressed, and hence no prophet speaks with fiercer scorn of the levity and frivolity, the conceit and arrogance, which show that men have no sense of the greatness of God and the solemnity of life. How painful it was to the man who would say, "Mine eyes have seen the King," to behold the giddy multitude hasting after foolish fashions and silly superstitions. From this point of view it follows that the great feature of the "day of Jehovah" as pictured by Isaiah is the bringing down of every high thing that has set itself up in pride and self-dependence against the glory of God.

"Enter into the rock and hide thee in the dust,
For fear of Jehovah and for the glory of His Majesty.
The lofty looks of man shall be humbled,
And the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down,
And Jehovah alone shall be exalted in that day."
(ii. 10.)

This is one of the most striking notes in Isaiah's prophecy, arrogance is branded as sin and folly. Mortal man ought to humble himself in the dust before God, but the vision that rebukes pride does

not paralyze effort. The man who so humbles himself gains strength to face kings, to guide the people and to wait calmly in the most critical hours. This vulgar pride is lack of faith in God. The frivolity of the women, the sensuality of the men, the greed of the rulers, the blindness of idolators, is all traced to its real root.

"But they regard not the word of Jehovah,
Neither have they considered the operation of His hands." (v. 12.)

Men and women who live in such brutish ignorance and false pride prove that they have no vision of God, consequently no reverence for human life. To those who have not been bowed down by the majesty of God there is nothing sacred; religious festivals, social pleasures, business pursuits are all so many forms of selfishness and manifestations of pride. Faith begets reverence and transforms the whole of life into a pure service, hence where it is lacking, the outside magnificence only makes the inward hollowness more striking to the discerning eye. Men who trust in money, in horses, in their own strength or in fashionable idols instead of in the living God are all doomed to disappointment. The man of faith whose life by reverential fear is rooted in God is a man of character; he can trust without being afraid, he can see through pretentious shams, he can be calm amid the panic-stricken crowd, he can work and wait.

"Bind thou up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples and I will wait upon Jehovah, that hideth His face from the house of Jacob, and I will look

for Him. Behold, I and the children whom Jehovah hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from Jehovah of hosts which dwelleth in Mount Zion." (viii. 16-18.)

(1) From the standpoint of faith the prophet can denounce idolatry. If there were no true revelation of the living God the eternal King, men might make idols or import them from other countries and so satisfy the craving for religion which is so hard to destroy but so easy to degrade. If there were no real prophet in Israel then there might be some slight excuse for foreign soothsayers. But to the man who knows the righteous God and can speak for Him, how hollow and helpless is all this restless, misdirected activity! The coming judgment will shrivel up all this pretentious foolishness.

"And the idols he shall utterly abolish,
And they shall go into the holes of the rocks,
And into the caves of the earth, for fear of Jehovah,
And for the glory of His Majesty,
When He ariseth to shake terribly the earth."
(ii. 19.)

(2) From the same lofty standpoint he can criticise the public worship of his time; instead of being an inspiration to goodness it is presented to Jehovah as a substitute for the same. The people trample the courts of the temple like a herd of senseless cattle. "Wickedness and worship" they have wedded together and they do not see the horrible inconsistency. On the other hand they have divorced religion from morality, that which God

has joined they have rent asunder. If they had faith, they would know that more than showy ritual is obedience to this great command.

"Wash you, make you clean;
Put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes;
Cease to do evil; learn to do well;
Seek judgment, relieve the oppressed,
Judge the fatherless, plead for the widow."
(i. 16-17.)

(3) A man who thus faces facts and finds God in common duties could have nothing but contempt for the false spiritualism of the day. "And when they shall say unto you, seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep and mutter: should not a people seek unto their God?" Yes, the man who knows what it is to seek God in sincerity and truth does not need such mockery. That which men preach as a new and better faith the prophet condemns as unbelief and superstition. If we can not find God in the sunshine and the shower, in pure worship and noble fellowship, in common cares and high duties, how shall we discover him in dark corners, in foolish mummery and fraudulent tricks? The King of Righteousness is a God of light who speaks to the mind He has created and the conscience He has quickened. Some doubt whether the particular words just quoted come from Isaiah, but there is no doubt that they represent his spirit. The man who could denounce impure worship in the regular temple would have still less sympathy with clandestine attempts to juggle with the mysteries of the spirit

world. And in our own time we should remember that such superstition is not excess of faith, but really want of faith. Faith lives in the light and does not need to nourish itself on that which is dark, morbid and unclean.

(4) The man of faith can face all changes calmly because he knows that nothing shall be destroyed that is worth preserving. This is Isaiah's strong conviction drawn from his vision of the righteousness of God. The prophet had strong feelings, he knew the sweetness of rapturous spiritual experience, he had passed through the agony of conflict and entered into the joy of victory. But he is often seen standing in a position that contrasts strongly with that taken by the people. They are panic-stricken, he can command them to put away their fear and look to God for deliverance. (viii.) When they are carried away with joy at an unexpected deliverance, a deliverance that he had prophesied, he warns them to prepare for God's searching judgments. (xxii.) In both cases he is working from the same principle, what he calls for is a deeper life. They are faint-hearted in the day of danger because they fear men rather than God; they are carried away by shallow excitement because escape from the foreign foe seems to be the supreme salvation. His strong faith keeps him from being carried away by these surface currents, his feet are on the solid rock, he proves that the man who fears God sincerely and intelligently need fear nothing else. The world is not ruled by clever politicians or successful soldiers, there is a God of righteousness who takes final responsibility on

Himself, hence it is only the chaff that the wind drives away, only the wood, hay and stubble that the fire consumes.

(5) Therefore the man of faith must also be to some extent the prophet of hope. Isaiah did not toil for forty years without cherishing great hopes for his city. Two of his great words, "With us is God" and "A remnant shall turn," have in them suggestions of hope as well as declarations of judgment. The prophet's great words may have been developed and differently applied by his successors, that which was living and plastic may have become hard and dogmatic, but while his circumstances were always difficult and his outlook often dark, the future was not altogether without hope. The early prophets were on the whole messengers of judgment, but it is scarcely correct to call them "pessimists." Their announcements of judgment were inspired by faith in the divine righteousness, or in modern phrase, the moral order of the world, and that is surely not a hopeless conviction. They knew that true religion could not be destroyed, and if religion lives and advances to higher forms hope will bloom into new loveliness. To them this world is the scene on which the eternal justice manifests itself and the kingdom of heaven is revealed, therefore in the darkest hour they can commend their work to God and the future time. A sure foundation is laid in Zion, even this, that the true believer does not falter, but endures as seeing Him who is invisible. The poor refuges to which faithless men flee in their desperation will all perish, but the link that

binds the faithful soul to God will stand the severest strain. The knowledge of God may be enlarged, the thought of Zion transformed, but the faith of an Isaiah remains the living principle of religion, the spiritual force that creates the true abiding Church.

THE PROPHET AS STATESMAN

"And nevertheless *God is with us.* In this Jerusalem, in this city of David, in this sanctuary of the old religion, God has been known, righteousness loved, the root of the matter reached, as they never have been in the world outside. The great world outside has nothing so indispensable to mankind, no germ so precious to mankind, as the 'Valley of Vision' has. Therefore 'he that believeth shall not take flight'; there is laid by the Eternal 'in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation.' *God is with us.*"—Matthew Arnold.

CHAPTER VII

THE PROPHET AS STATESMAN

(ISAIAH VII. 22.)

Isaiah of Jerusalem was by his loftiness of character and firmness of principle utterly unfitted to be a popular politician of the baser sort; but as a statesman who cherished a noble ideal of civic and national life, and who saw clearly the duty of the hour, he has left an enduring name. He shows a remarkable combination of spiritual enthusiasm and sanity of judgment, pure idealism and practical wisdom. It is difficult to sketch a systematic biography of the man, or to give a full account of his thoughts concerning the future destiny of his people; but the dominant principles of his life stand out clearly, and we know the position that he took in the great political crises. He is a striking figure, an aristocrat who met on equal terms with kings and courtiers, yet a preacher who makes with peculiar emphasis the demand for humility in the presence of the divine King. A poet who can sing to attract attention, but whose song will surely turn into a sermon (v.). An oriental orator using strange symbolism to impress his message upon the minds of the thoughtless people, but no mere sensation monger. (xx.) A man capable of

standing alone, but also gifted with the power to draw round him a few sympathetic disciples who are the providential means of preserving his message and carrying on his work. He is a married man and has two sons who bear strange names; one of these speaks of judgment, and the other suggests mercy (viii. 2, vii. 3). He is not a pale-faced ascetic or a shrinking sentimentalist, but a strong, full-blooded man, who will seize the whole of life and sanctify it in the name of Jehovah. He does not despise the name of prophet; prophecy to him is a high vocation. If the name has fallen into disrepute he will rescue it and make it a name that men must respect. He is a man of high mettle, he finds it quite consistent with true lowliness to pour contempt upon a weak vacillating king, to fling back fiery scorn against irreverent mockers, and to denounce falsehood and folly in words that burn and blister (vii, xxviii). His characteristic feature, to sum up in a word, is strength, the strength that comes from clearness of thought, firmness of purpose and well balanced passion.

HIS CONCEPTION OF THE NATION.

We must not make too deep the distinction between poet, preacher and statesman; the prophet himself did not recognize any such divisions. It is difficult indeed to find a man who is more completely one by virtue of loyalty to one central, vital principle, a man whose varied activities are really aspects of the one life, of whom we may justly say that one spirit runs through his manifold ministry. In his teaching there are germs of truth that will

require centuries before they reach full maturity, but for the present he has a clear, straight message for the city and the nation. What is the nation in his view? It is not a chance conglomeration of individuals, it is not a creation of cunning politicians. It is a thing that God has made, on which He has spent loving toil and care, and from which He expects fruit noble and beautiful. The union of privilege and responsibility is a cardinal principle with this great preacher; on such a soil as this, shallow irresponsible patriotism or narrow religious bigotry cannot grow.

"A vineyard belongs to my friend,
On a hill that is fruitful and sunny;
He digged it and cleared it of stones,
And planted there vines that are choice;
A tower he built in the midst,
And hewed also therein a wine-vat,
And he looked to find grapes that are good;
Alas, it bore grapes that are wild."*

THE CIVIC REFORMER.

Here is a principle that needed to be thoroughly worked out in relation to one nation that it might become the common property of humanity. How much of faith and hope as well as of pain and disappointment is concentrated in the sharp utterance, "He looked for judgment but behold oppression; for righteousness but behold a cry." (v: 7.) All else is implied in this, here is high opportunity and

*v. 1-2, Dr. Cheyne's Translation.

reluctant judgment. If this is commonplace truth, it is also fundamental, and in our prophet it finds fresh, varied, unconventional expression.

We are in our own time confronted with a great problem, namely, to make the complex life of the great city a new embodiment of the kingdom of God. This problem meets us now on a much larger scale, but in principle it is the same, it must be faced with the same unfaltering faith. We cannot return to rural simplicity, or find refuge in a rude puritanism; religion must again conquer and consecrate science, art and politics. Isaiah was a man of the city, he could satirize the ridiculous vanity and aping of foreign fashions displayed there, but these are only the fringe of his great theme. He loved the city, all his interests and hopes were centered in it; he longed that Jerusalem might become the home of righteousness, the abode of peace. Love can strike the mightiest blows; no cynical criticism, no scornful satire can have such power in it as the lament of love.

"How has the faithful city become a harlot!
Zion filled with judgment, righteousness lodged in her!
Thy silver has become dross, thy drink adulterated;
Thy princes are rebellious and companions of thieves;
They all love bribes and seek after rewards;
The widow's cause comes not to them, the fatherless they do not judge.
Therefore saith Jehovah, the Mighty One of Israel,
Ah, let me ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of my foes,

And I will turn my hand against thee, and purify
thee with lye;
Thy dross will I remove, all thine alloy,
And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and
thy counsellors as at the beginning;
Afterwards thou shalt be called Town of Right-
eousness, Faithful City."

This is not the utterance of cynical disappointment or fierce fanaticism, it is the sober application of a high ideal to a low state of civic life. There had been a wave of prosperity, and with it came many "improvements," the ordinary councillor could speak glibly complacent congratulations on the rapid march of progress, but the prophet sees that palace and temple, council chamber and judgment hall are full of unrighteousness. The preacher seeks to quicken the conscience of the community. He would not stifle innocent joy or stimulate a false solemnity, what he demands is honesty in the presence of God, and fairness between man and man. He is not a popularizer of small fads, but a preacher of justice in the largest sense. God is on the side of righteousness, He demands from the rulers of the city real service; He is not like themselves, easy to bribe with large gifts. He hates the sacrifice that is purchased out of the plunder gained by grinding the faces of the poor. The supreme thing in the city is not the outward form of government or the display of material splendour, but the character of the citizen, the moral life in street and market, church and home.

TWO PERIODS, ONE POLICY.

Isaiah had something to say on the question of foreign politics, he was not prepared to accept the view evidently cherished by Ahaz, that this region lies outside the range of religion. It is a doctrine popular with a certain class of politicians that a small amount of religious sentiment may safely be introduced into politics strictly for home consumption, but that in foreign relationships such considerations are out of place and highly dangerous. Ahaz did not wish any sign from heaven in that department of his affairs; he thought that he could manage very cleverly on the line of worldly policy; perhaps he had made his choice and committed himself before Isaiah appeared on the scene. The prophet does not wish to be very troublesome, but he has a principle which he believes to be applicable to all these affairs, and upon the clear and full recognition of it depends the life of this nation. Hence we see the political event and the prophet's call placed side by side.

"And it was told the house of David, saying, Syria is confederate with Ephraim. And his heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind."

"Then said the Lord unto Isaiah, Go forth now to meet Ahaz, thou and Shear-jashub*, thy son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field, and say unto him:

*A remnant shall turn.

"Take heed and be quiet,
Fear not, neither be faint-hearted,
For the two tails of these smoking firebrands,
For the fierce anger of Rezin with Syria,
And of the son of Remaliah." (vii. 2-4.)

This is a prophecy of comfort if men have faith to receive it, but the same principle lies behind the comfortable words of a true prophet and his words of condemnation; what is demanded in both cases is recognition of God's purpose, trust in His power and acceptance of His righteousness. This is certainly a critical situation when the Israelites and the Aramæans, the brother and the cousin, conspire against the small kingdom of Judah. What is to be done when princes are trembling and the people full of fear? In such an hour the man who waits upon God knows that there is help and guidance from a higher sphere. He is laid hold of powerfully and taught that he must not be carried away by the cry that prevails in the street, but must wrestle mightily with those who are fearful of the outside foe and have no reverence for the righteous God who dwells in Zion. Jehovah guides the course of history, princes and politicians are mere pawns in His hand; is it not folly then to tremble at those who can do so little? (viii. 11-15.) The king of Judah has decided what he will do,—he will call in the aid of the great Assyrian Empire which is just coming into contact with the Palestinian powers; in that way he will checkmate the conspiracy of his two nearer neighbors. (II. Kings xvi.) We can now see clearly that this was the height of folly.

The Assyrians will be knocking at the gates of Jerusalem soon enough. It meant paying the king of Assyria to do what he meant to do in any case, namely, attack Aram; it meant Judah assuming voluntarily the position of a vassal to a great alien power; it meant foreign influence on Jewish social and religious life; in other words, it meant surrendering everything in an hour of weakness and faithlessness. To the prophet it was apostasy from pure religion and treason against heaven's King. Jehovah has chosen Judah and will accomplish His purpose through her; let her stand on the defensive, trust in Him and bide her time. In this case loyalty to the ideal did not mean the unpractical thing, it never does if we understand it rightly; if we had more real faith there would be less need for unworthy compromise. The great word IMMANUEL meant to the prophet "With us is God," and not simply God will some day be with men in a nobler form. Because of the lofty faith that is expressed it was capable of gathering around it the most sacred associations and becoming a prophecy of the highest. If on that memorable day king and people could have risen to the level of Isaiah they would not have played the traitor to the God of their fathers, to themselves and to their children; knowing that God was with them, they would have kept free from an alliance which was in its nature disgraceful and which from any point of view was not worth what it cost, and they would have been saved from such shameful disaster.

But if such an alliance is wrong and harmful, will not the prophet help them to get rid of it later on?

Certainly not. Men must be faithful in something; if they will not be faithful to God they must surely keep their own bargains. In the days of the next king Hezekiah, when Aram and Israel had been conquered and the Assyrian came unpleasantly near, an Egyptian alliance was popular. In the prophet's opinion it was wicked to enter into any alliance, but to break away from obligations that the nation had contracted was a still greater degree of wickedness. Over thirty years have passed away, Judah has reaped the results of the disastrous policy against which the prophet had fought so fiercely; Hezekiah has made some attempts at religious reformation, and the life of the small state of Judah has been saved from complete confusion. But the battle was hard and it is no injustice to the unknown few to say that the one faithful life, the one steady light, was that of Isaiah. This is what he thinks of an Egyptian alliance:

"Woe to the rebellious children, saith Jehovah,
That take counsel, but not of me;
And that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit,
That they may add sin to sin:
That walk to go down into Egypt,
And have not asked at my mouth,
To strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh,
And to trust in the shadow of Egypt!
Therefore shall the strength of Pharaoh be your shame,
And the trust in the shadow of Egypt your confusion." (xxx. 1-3.)

"For thus saith the Lord Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel,
In returning and rest shall ye be saved;
In quietness and confidence shall be your strength;
And ye would not, but ye said No!
For we will flee upon horses, therefore shall ye flee;
And on the swift will we ride, therefore shall your pursuers be swift." (xxx. 15.)

The politicians and diplomats of that time prided themselves upon their accurate measurement of worldly forces, but they left God out of account. Isaiah maintains that because Jehovah is the real King of the world, righteousness and morality are the greatest forces; the kingdom that rests simply on greed and violence cannot endure, because it violates the fundamental law of life, and insults the majesty of God. With him faith is not a substitute for action, nor religion a sentimental luxury; he works always from the one central principle which is the essence of religion and the inspiration of noble conduct; it is the recognition of God's justice in such a manner as to bring it to bear on all the relationships of life. His efforts to enforce this principle in national affairs involved a severe continuous struggle. He was charged with wearisome repetition of his commonplace morality, as if it were any valid objection to a great lesson that we have heard it before. The prophet is driven to reply that those who reject this teaching in simple homely garb will have to look upon it in the sufficiently sensational dress of a foreign conqueror. If we find common ministries to be tame and meaningless we may force God to his

"strange work" of judgment; in that dread hour our cleverness will shrink to its real smallness, even in our own sight. Thus would he reply to frivolous chatter, and he found as little satisfaction in the shallow congratulations that fluttered around him in his brief hours of success; but such a strenuous life for forty years is not lived without satisfaction of the noblest kind, the sense of duty well performed and the sympathy of a few discerning spirits. Even his brightest vision could never picture the full significance of the service that he had rendered to mankind in maintaining that the true strength of a nation lies in its faithfulness to righteousness, its loyalty to a God-given vocation.

In his ministry we find also the beginnings of the church as distinct from the state. The word "disciple" occurs on almost every page of the New Testament record, but in the early Hebrew literature it is very rare. The word is, according to our present text, used once by Isaiah, but we know that the living reality must have played a great part in his fruitful ministry. Of course the thing is old enough. Moses in the earliest days must have had disciples, men who sympathized with his aims and were touched by his spirit, and who were eager to preserve the good tradition. But here it attains a clearness, a distinction and spirituality that is never again completely lost. (viii: 16-18, xxx: 8-11.) Such prophecy could not be learned as an art or practised as a trade, but truth could be taught and the intelligent spirit of religion kept alive. Isaiah did not desire a party in the narrow sense of that word, he knew too well how easily men take a fragment of the truth and

transform it into a fetich, to worship it in a mechanical fashion. It would have caused him still deeper pain if he could have seen how some of his noblest sayings would be turned to false dogmatic uses. Neither did he conceive of the church as separate from the nation; his ideal was to have commerce so clean, worship so pure, and politics so honest that it would all be a real service to God. But the effect of his teaching was to create a body of disciples and to stimulate thought along the lines of what we call religious truth. One grand result traceable to him and men of like spirit was that when the catastrophe came that destroyed the nation there was something that could not perish, a life that would create new forms for itself. In this he prepared the way for One who built His church upon the same rock of faithfulness and declared that the gates of hell would not prevail against it. If in these latest ages we combine the intelligent zeal of Isaiah with the gentle spirit of Jesus, we shall fight the necessary battle for righeousness in every sphere of life and refuse to acknowledge that there is any region of man's knowledge or activity where the presence of the King cannot be felt and obeyed. Thus among the most influential of the forerunners of our Lord in the Hebrew nation we place Isaiah of Jerusalem, poet and preacher, reformer and statesman.

PROPHETIC FELLOWSHIP; OR UNITY AND INDIVIDUALITY

"It follows that in the narrower sense of the word the age of saints is not past. There has never been a time when the Gospel has not vindicated its sovereignty and Christ has not found His living interpreters. We have not as yet been taught to give an open place in our public services to the latest heroes of faith, but I trust nevertheless they are not forgotten. I trust that we call up in grateful memory saints whom we have known—the glory of their devoted service to give distinctness to thanksgiving and hymns. There is not one among us whose study and whose experience may not bring some dear companion, whom he has learnt to recognize in the silent converse of books, or in the stirring conflicts of duty, to swell 'the glorious company of the Apostles' and 'the goodly friendship of the prophets' and 'the noble army of martyrs,' men who in these later days and in our own church have heard a call from God and interpreted it, men who have received a burden at the hands of God and in trust on Him have borne it, saints who have not been reckoned in any calendar."—The Late Bishop B. F. Westcott, "Social Aspects of Christianity," page 157.

CHAPTER. VIII

PROPHETIC FELLOWSHIP; OR UNITY AND INDIVIDUALITY

Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah—these four names stand out boldly in the history of Hebrew religion in what is called the Assyrian period; their prophetic activity falls within the last fifty or sixty years of the eighth century B. C. Seen from this distance of time they are the true heroes, the real immortals of that age. Priests, princes, politicians, are all thrown into the shade by these four great preachers. There were other men of clear purpose and earnest endeavour after a nobler life, but these four were the real leaders of a higher movement in the sphere of religious thought. We are thankful for the nameless saints who gave their lives for the truth though they have left no visible memorial, but we are still more thankful that from such a time of darkness and disaster some splendid fragments remain to show the quality of thought and style of speech that came from those men who fought the stern battle of truth and righteousness. We cannot be sure that any one of these men was acquainted with any other; indeed the probabilities point the other way, and at any rate there is no record of such personal intercourse. The higher move-

ment of thought which owes so much to their influence was not an organized effort or party enterprise. These men stood very much alone, their message was despised or neglected, but from men of such mighty faith and strong personal influence there went forth a quickening power which did not altogether fail in its mission. We know that one of them had "disciples," and it is likely that the others also found a few sympathetic hearers and congenial companions. Spiritual influences do not any more than natural energy travel through a perfect vacuum; the great creative thinkers are few, but smaller men who have the power to receive and retain new forms of truth may also play an important part.

Even if these four men had no actual personal intercourse we can think and speak of them as forming a spiritual company, a prophetic fellowship. They belong to the same age, they face the same problems and meet the same difficulties. They live under the same political conditions, their circumstances are in many respects similar, they all look to the great Assyrian power as the instrument of those judgments which manifest the righteousness of God. In other words they have the same background of history and breathe the same spiritual atmosphere. Yet each of them has a strongly marked individuality; no one of them is a mere imitator; each man is himself and not to be confounded with any other; intense faithfulness to the same great principles issues in peculiarity of thought and distinction of character. They all proclaim the righteousness of God and the spirituality

of religion, but each with his own tone, accent and emphasis. These great original preachers are all impelled by clear intelligence and passionate feeling, but the sternness of Amos differs from that of Isaiah, and the intense emotion of Hosea is unlike Micah's fierce passion. One has breadth, another intensity; one moves us by the fiery outburst of mingled pity and indignation, the other by the power of clear, consistent, concentrated thought.

COMMON FEATURES.

All these men look upon impurity of worship and unrighteousness of conduct as wicked and foolish rebellion against a God who has been generous in his gifts and gracious in his guidance:

"Also I brought you up out of the land of Egypt,
And led you forty years in the wilderness,
To possess the land of the Amorite,
And I raised up of your sons for prophets,
And of your young men for Nazirites;
Is it not even thus, O ye children of Israel?"
(Amos ii. 10, 11.)

"When Israel was young then I loved him,
And called my son out of Egypt."
"I did know thee in the wilderness,
In the land of great drought."
(Hosea xi. 1; xiii. 5.)

"Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for Jehovah hath spoken. Sons have I made great and exalted and they have been untrue to me."
(Isaiah i. 2.)

In Micah also the unfaithfulness is clearly and strongly stated, even if the privileges and blessings are not set forward so prominently. The peasant prophet, as is natural, confines himself to the sad facts of corruption and disorder among his own people; he does not reveal such a wide outlook of politics or large background of history.

All the four prophets complain bitterly that true teaching, faithful ministry is treated with coarse contempt.

"But ye gave the Nazirites wine to drink
And commanded the prophets, saying,
Prophesy not."

(Amos ii. 12.)

"Though I wrote for him my law in myriad forms
They are counted as a strange thing."

(Hosea viii. 12.)

"For it is a rebellious people;
They are lying sons
Who will not hear the teachings of Jehovah."

(Isaiah xxx. 9.)

"If a man walking in wind and falsehood deals in lies,
I will prophesy unto thee of wine and strong drink;
Even he shall be the prophet of this people."

(Micah ii. 11.)

In these prophecies we find the strongest denunciations of greed and injustice; and in these strong words there is a threefold revelation. First of social disorder resulting from increasing division between class and class; second, of the prophet's strong pas-

sion for justice; and third, of his intense pity for the poor. These elements may be differently balanced in the individual prophets.

"Ye that afflict the just, that take a bribe
And turn aside the needy in the gate."
(Amos v. 12.)

"There is nought but perjury and lying,
Killing and stealing and committing adultery;
They commit acts of violence,
They heap murder on murder."
(Hosea iv. 2.)

"Woe to those who join house to house,
Who lay field to field
Until no room is left
And ye dwell alone in the midst of the land."
(Isaiah v. 8.)

"Woe to those who devise iniquity
And execute evil upon their beds;
In the morning light they practise it
Because it is in the power of their hands;
They covet fields and seize them,
And houses and take them away;
They oppress a man and his house,
Even a man and his heritage."
(Micah ii. 1, 2.)

It is evident that we have here the common character of pre-exilic prophecy in which condemnation rather than consolation was the dominant note. This is further confirmed when we observe the attitude of these teachers to the public worship of their time. Micah in his prophecy against Samaria has

one short, scathing allusion to "her graven images"; and the following fierce attack on Zion should be carefully compared with Isaiah's song of the city:

"Her chiefs judge for reward
And her priests teach for hire;
Her prophets divine for money,
Yet they will lean upon Jehovah and say,
Is not Jehovah in the midst of us?
No evil shall come upon us!"
(Micah iii. 11; cf. Isa. i. 21-26.)

Isaiah distinctly repudiates in the name of Jehovah the gorgeous ceremonial which the Jerusalem worshippers offer as a substitute for righteousness of daily life. "Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul loathes; they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them." Of the two earlier prophets it is not necessary to speak in this connection, as their preaching is a powerful polemic against an impure sensual worship offered at the various sanctuaries in Northern Israel. This characteristic passage from Amos should also be compared with the stern sermon delivered by Isaiah to the worshippers at Jerusalem:

"I hate, I despise your feasts;
I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies."
"But let judgment roll down as waters,
And righteousness as a mighty stream."
(Amos v. 21-24.)

Hosea in his own way reiterates the same great truth, that obedience is better than sacrifice, "and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."

Neither shall their sacrifices be pleasing unto Him;
Their bread shall be unto them as the bread of mourners,
For their bread shall be only for their hunger;
It shall not come into the house of Jehovah.
What will ye do in the day of solemn assembly,
And in the day of the feast of Jehovah?"
(Hosea ix. 4, 5.)

DISTINCTIVE CHARACTER.

A careful student may note individuality of tone and temper even when the same theme is handled. The points of contact do not by any means furnish us with cases of mere mechanical repetition. But each prophet has also his own special message, and no one name can do justice to this particular feature. Names, however, are helpful if we remember the limitation under which they are used.

THE PROPHET OF MORALITY.

The prophets did not separate morality from religion; in fact their whole ministry was a protest against such separation, and they rendered an eternal service by insisting that religion must manifest itself in all the relations of private and social life. Hence, while it would be unjust to class as "a mere moralist" a man who claims so distinctly to have an original message from God, there is a real sense in which Amos may be called the prophet of morality. He marks a new epoch in the ethical teaching of the Hebrew religion. Read his wide survey in the first chapter and see how such strong moral

teaching breaks down national and sectarian barriers. It is through this teaching, practically applied to social and political life, that the religion of Israel is to become conscious of its large significance and world-wide mission. Note how he takes such popular phrases as "the day of Jehovah" and "Jehovah of hosts" and sanctifies them for future service by cleansing them from base, selfish associations and making them the medium of his own nobler teaching. We cannot claim for Amos subtlety of thought or tenderness of feeling, but he loyally placed at the service of his God a largeness of view, a breadth of sympathy, a stern passion for righteousness. That is a noble contribution for one man in any age. If Amos had been complete there would have been no need for any other; what he was commissioned to give was partial, but it was of the highest value. The man who in a time of low ideals and coarse sensual religion could say—

"You only have I known of all the families of the earth,
Therefore will I visit upon you all your iniquities,"

that man gave religion the supreme place, and prepared the way for those who should explain more fully the connection between election and service.*

THE PROPHET OF LOVE.

The book of Hosea is difficult from the point of view of continuous reading and minute interpretation, but the general impression is clear, and as we glance over it we have a feeling of familiarity be-

*See Chapter XXI.

cause of the fact that so many of these fragments have entered into common religious speech. For example: "I will have mercy and not sacrifice." "Come, let us to the Lord return." "Your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the dew that goeth early away." "For they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind." "Gray hairs are here and there upon him, and he knoweth it not." "Ephraim is a cake not turned," etc. Though it may be difficult to explain the details of this prophecy, we can easily form a distinct conception of Hosea as a man of intense feeling and a prophet of love. He is tender and emotional; he has passed through sad domestic experiences; the facts of his life and the peculiarities of his temperament influence the intellectual forms of his message. His treatment of Israel's unfaithfulness is very different from that of Amos. Israel is the unfaithful bride of Jehovah and all her pretentious impure worship is so much harlotry, a powerful figure that is much used by later prophets. Hosea has his own interpretation of history; he looks upon the schism as a sin, and declares that God will avenge "the blood of Jezreel." Like Isaiah he uses symbolic names which speak of mercy and judgment. And if he does not give us detailed pictures of future blessedness, he knows how as a poet and preacher to mingle light and shade. This is not conscious art, but the actual reflection of his own changing moods and alternating hopes and fears.

"I will heal their backsliding,
I will love them freely,
I will be as the dew unto Israel:

He shall blossom as the lily,
And cast forth his roots as Lebanon."
(xiv. 4, 5.)

Other prophets teach us that judgment is Jehovah's "strange work," but here we find this truth expressed in the tender tones of love, and with a compassion that is prophetic of the gentleness of Christ:

"How shall I give thee up, O Ephraim?
How shall I deliver thee, Israel?
How shall I make thee as Admah?
How shall I set thee as Zeboim?
Mine heart is turned within me,
My compassions are kindled together." (xi.8.)

It is significant and suggestive that when the prophet expresses most strongly the pitiful tenderness with which Jehovah stoops over the people whom He is compelled to punish, that He can add as a reason both for the mercy and the judgment:

"For I am God and not man,
The Holy One in the midst of thee."
(xi. 8, 9.)

THE PROPHET OF THE POOR.

In the original prophecy of Micah (i-iii) there is neither the breadth of Amos, the intensity and variety of Hosea nor the splendour of Isaiah; after the noble opening there is a certain plainness and grimness. Micah is true to his character as a plain man of the country, who fears God and hates injustice. His preaching, however, is not mere political socialism, it is thoroughly suffused with religious

feeling; the poor who are oppressed lose by ruthless eviction; lose not only the piece of land which gave them life, but also a lot in "the congregation of Jehovah." He is not a theologian in any large sense, he is not a statesman, but as rustic poet and patriot preacher he plays his part and contributes his share to the great literature which represents such a wonderfully varied life. If we note this characteristic utterance we may see clearly that rugged force rather than politeness and polish marks the utterance of this man from the lowlands of Judah.

"And I said—Hear, I pray you, ye heads of Jacob,
And rulers of the house of Israel,
Is it not for you to know judgment?
They hate the good and love the evil,
They tear the skin off the body
And the flesh from off the bones,
They devour the flesh of my people,
They take the skin off their bodies,
They bruise their bones,
They chop them in pieces as for the pot."
(iii. 1-4.)

THE PROPHET OF FAITH.

Isaiah has much in common with all the other great prophets of this period; from the standpoint of lofty thought and large influence he is the greatest. He is poet and preacher, thinker and statesman. When we speak of him as the prophet of faith it is not to suggest that he has a theory of faith, but rather to emphasize the fact that he brings a nobler faith because he has a grander conception

of God. The purity and majesty of God is the centre of his thought; his faith in the Eternal King is so intense, intelligent and well balanced that it controls his thinking and builds it up into a living system of truth. This faith begets real reverence; it reveals to a man his weakness and then makes him strong; it brings in a fear of God that drives out all base fear; it casts a man down that it may inspire and uplift him. Hence, "the day of Jehovah" is a day when man's foolish arrogance and paltry pride will be cast down before the presence of the divine King. Because the worship in the temple, the business of the civic council, the politics of the court, because all these forms of life can now be seen to be feeble and impure, men ought to know better than look forward to "the day of Jehovah" with shallow self-satisfaction. A faith such as Isaiah possesed was the foe of all those evils against which the other prophets declaimed. If men had more of this faith they would respond to the demand of Amos for brotherhood, of Hosea for kindness and loyalty, of Micah for justice; such faith is not a mere theory or formula, but a living force which leads a man to cherish thoughtfulness and reverence in all times and places, because he sees that the whole earth is filled with the glory of the Lord. "Mine eyes have seen the King" means that there is order everywhere, and that the man who fights for righteousness has behind him the strength of universal and everlasting law.

THE PROPHET AS DISCIPLE

"Zephaniah is of importance to us less on his own account than because of his use of Isaiah. He shows what use a sober imitator can make of the master's material of thought. And indeed the striking thing is the emphasis with which at least the extensive completeness of the judgment as well as of the restoration is made prominent: all peoples shall be punished, purified and made serviceable to Jehovah. It was not given to Zephaniah to penetrate to the depth of his model, hence his prophecy does not mark an advance, least of all in view of his contemporary Jeremiah; but he is one of those who bear witness to the significance of Isaiah for the religion of Israel."—B. Duhm, "Die Theologie der Propheten," page 225.

"Prophecy was again roused from its slumbers by the trumpet notes of the world's history. In 650 the Assyrian Empire was, if anything, greater and mightier than ever. But now destiny knocked at its gates. From the coasts of the Black Sea a storm broke forth over Asia, such as man had never before witnessed. Wild tribes of horsemen, after the manner of the later Huns and Mongolians, overran for more than twenty years all Asia on their fast horses, which seemed never to tire, spreading everywhere desolation and terror. Egypt had torn itself away from the rule of the Assyrians, and a new and terrible enemy in the Medes who were now consolidating their forces in the rear of Nineveh appeared. The Assyrian world-edifice cracked in all its joints, and grave revolutions were imminent. At once prophecy is at hand with the small but valuable book of Zephaniah. The thunder of the last judgment rolls in Zephaniah's powerful words, whose dithyrambic lilt and wondrous music no translation can render. The *Dies irae, dies illa,* which the Roman church and the whole musical world now sings as a requiem, is taken word for word from Zephaniah."—Prof. C. H. Cornill, "The Prophets of Israel," page 76.

CHAPTER IX

THE PROPHET AS DISCIPLE

(ZEPHANIAH)

The great creative minds, the original leaders of the highest movements are few, hence we must not undervalue the prophets and teachers of secondary rank who according to their capacity develop and apply the truth that has been given. After the preaching of the four great prophets, the judgment that confirmed it, and the attempted reformation that came out of it, there was a violent reaction marked by gloomy superstition and bitter persecution. Between these dark days under Manasseh and the new reforming movement under Josiah, Zephaniah exercised his ministry. The book ascribed to him is a small one, but it is sufficient to show that he is a disciple, that is, he is dependent upon his predecessors and especially upon the great Isaiah; and further that he has distinct individuality, the fragment of truth that he does grasp he uses effectively for practical purposes.

By the substance of his thought, as well as the style of his teaching, this prophet is linked to Isaiah. Like that great prophet he also is a man of Jerusalem, well acquainted with the city and addressing his admonitions specially to its inhabitants. "The

princes and the king's children" receive particular attention; the quarters of the city where the judgment is likely to strike first are pointed out. The local colour and social atmosphere is that of a man quite familiar with the varied life and activity of the capital. In this connection then it is worthy of note that Hezekiah, the ancestor of Zephaniah, referred to in the superscription, may be the king of that name with whom Isaiah had so much to do, and in whose reign a real if not effective effort was made for the reformation of religion. The preaching of Isaiah and the reforming zeal of Hezekiah, superficially considered, seem to have overshot the mark and ended in complete failure. But a new race of teachers and reformers is about to arise who will be something more than pale reflections of the earlier prophets; men who will broaden the message and adapt it to new conditions. In Zephaniah the influence of the old can be very clearly traced, while there is clearly visible a new beginning of zeal and hopefulness. He may be correctly called a prophet of judgment, though even if we leave out of consideration the beautiful passage with which the book closes we may still say that he knows how to mingle promise with threatening. At the beginning we read, "I will cut off man from off the land, saith Jehovah. I will also stretch out mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem," and at the end we have this promise: "The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth, for they shall feed and lie down and none shall make them afraid."

OLDER THOUGHTS IN A NEW SETTING.

When Zephaniah declares that Jehovah will root out what is left of Baal worship he is taking his place in a long line of men who fought for the spirituality of religion and the purity of worship. (i. 4.) For centuries this warfare has been carried on in various forms. Indeed, when the Hebrews came into Palestine with their nobler faith and purer thought of God war to the death was inevitable. This was a long, costly struggle. One important incident in it was the destruction of Northern Israel, where Elijah had fought so heroically and Hosea preached in such tender plaintive tones. (1 Kings xviii.; Hosea ii. 16.) Sensuous superstition in the form of coarse nature worship lingers on in Palestine to this day, but the prophet was right in his belief that by means of a great judgment God would gain for Himself a people whose religion would move on a higher level of intelligence and in a sweeter atmosphere of piety. It was not by judgment alone that this was brought about, but also by the ministry of faithful men who were ever seeking to cleanse religion from the impure elements common to that time and place. When the name Baal was set aside much still remained to be done, for the old paganism can live very vigorously under new and higher names.

It is instructive to compare Zephaniah's announcement of judgment with that of other prophets. He has caught something of the tone and style of Amos and Isaiah, and if there is a tendency to a more systematic treatment of the theme there is less original

connection of thought. Amos reverses the popular view of "the day of Jehovah" by showing the real nature of God's demands. In Isaiah this great day is a manifestation of the majesty of the divine King, before which the power and pride of men is bowed down. In both these cases the message comes first to Israel and Judah; its universal significance grows out of its moral nature, or in other words, springs from the fact that the principles of righteousness revealed in God's dealings with Israel must be applicable to the whole world. In our prophet the setting is different; the prophecy begins with a general announcement: "I will utterly consume all things from off the face of the ground, saith Jehovah. I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea," etc. Without giving any reason for this world-wide catastrophe, the statement is narrowed down to a threat against Judah and Jerusalem, for which detailed reasons are given. Thus the punishment of Judah is treated as an incident in a judgment universal in its scope and character. The classic passage beginning "The great day of Jehovah is near. It is near and greatly hasteth" has also a certain vagueness which has fitted it for use in later days as a vehicle for the solemn suggestion of a great day of doom. (i. 14-7.) No doubt it is impressive to be reminded that "the day of Jehovah is near," but it must not lead us to forget the other truth which the prophets helped to make clear, namely, that life itself is a constant silent process of judgment.

The threat against Assyria and Nineveh, its chief city, was not new. About this period it received its strongest, most passionate expression in the prophecy of Nahum. One can understand how after the tyranny and cruelty of Assyria, and after Isaiah's teaching that though Jehovah might use the proud empire he would punish it, the people of Judah came to look upon this particular foreign power as the personification of wickedness. The judgment of the world has as one of its chief features the destruction of Nineveh. A century later Babylon came to occupy this place in the thoughts of Jewish patriots, but as yet the Babylonian conquest with all its horrors is still in the future. This prediction is not a mere cry for revenge, but an expression of faith in a righteous ruler who will bring the proud nation to account for its many crimes. It was amply fulfilled, even if the event came about in a form somewhat different from the prophet's expectations.

HIS MESSAGE TO THE CITY.

Zephaniah resembles the earlier prophets in this that he announces judgment coming upon his own people. He does not develop at great length his conception of God's character, but states briefly, "Jehovah is righteous in the midst of her; morning by morning He brings His justice to light." However, by his strong specific charge against the city he shows clearly that Jehovah demands social righteousness and religious purity. He sets forth the judgment in a startling form: It is "the day of Jehovah's sacrifice." "Jehovah hath prepared a sacrifice; He hath bid His guests." The

prophet sees the weird picture and makes it stand out clearly by a few sharp strokes. Judah is the victim in a sacrificial meal; the slaughter is complete; her enemies gather now in solemn silence round the altar. The grim idea is not altogether new, but the prophet is not a smooth imitator of other men's illustrations. Yet in this place and in the word play of ii. 4 this supposed descendant of King Hezekiah does remind us of the peasant prophet Micah.

What then are the sins which merit such terrible doom, and make it so inevitable? The lawlessness of princes and the coarse selfishness of priests. The dishonesty of traffickers and the careless frivolity of the common people. There is lack of true leadership and, as Hosea said, it is "like priest, like people." What a terrible indictment is this:

"Woe to her that is rebellious and polluted, to the oppressing city!
She obeyed not the voice; she received not instruction;
She trusted not in Jehovah; she drew not near to her God.
Her princes within her are roaring lions;
Her judges are evening wolves;
Her prophets are bragging, treacherous men;
They leave nothing till the morrow.
Her priests have profaned the sacred things, they have done violence to the law."

This is certainly a powerful picture of social disorder and reckless irresponsibility; and in such circumstances we are not surprised to learn that from the point of view of religion matters are in a hope-

less condition. Some practice foreign idolatries; "they worship the host of heaven upon the house tops." These ape recent fashions and import their religion, as well as their clothes, from abroad. Some pray to Jehovah and swear by Molech they are determined to avoid fanaticism and think it safer to have two gods than one. They do not understand that there is a noble intolerance—the outcome of intelligence and faith. And then there are the sceptics, those who think that all this trouble about religion of one kind or the other is absurd.

"I will search Jerusalem with lanterns,
And punish the men that are settled on their lees
That say in their heart, Jehovah will not do good,
Neither will He do evil."

These are the indifferent who have no faith, no zeal in God's service, no sense of public duty. They justify themselves on the plea that Jehovah is an absentee God, who does nothing, but allows the world to whirl along in any careless fashion. This is the real infidelity, this assertion that there is no real vindication of divine law in human life, and hence no significance in worship, no meaning in duty. When Jehovah comes on His round of inspection and searches out the dark corners that easy-going folly will be put to shame.

In such a chaotic condition of things, with sweeping judgment inevitable, where is there room for any hope?

Logically it seems to be excluded; the prophet's scheme of thought scarcely provides for it, but his

soul hungers for it and faith leaps up into the face of fear.

"Seek Jehovah, all ye humble ones of the earth;
Ye who perform His ordinances
Seek righteousness, seek humility;
It may be that ye shall be hidden in the day of Jehovah's anger."—(ii. 3.)

THE PROPHET OF VENGEANCE—NAHUM

NAHUM

"So he chants of winds and the earthquake: these are the hot breath and the awful tread of God. Of old He was the Maker and the Lord of the rain, and of all that rain could bring of evil and of good. The clouds that darkened the sky were the dust flung up by His feet and by His hosts that rushed along at His will. Men saw the cloud, and then they knew that He was coming. So today cries Nahum, the dashing of great waves, the drying away of our rivers, is all caused by His treading on the sea and streams. There flash the lightnings; they are the gleam of His sword and spear. See, the tops of mountains are dashed off, and roll away down as in a molten stream to the plain. This is because He is planting His feet on the high places, whereon He may alight as He descends to earth. It is His anger's heat that burns in summer time the forests of Lebanon, the vines on Carmel, and the wheat fields of Bashan. When our elements rage, it is our God Iahweh who rages. Know then His awful anger; understand His heart."—Prof. A. Duff, LL.D., "Old Testament Theology," ii. 48.

CHAPTER X

THE PROPHET OF VENGEANCE—NAHUM

The great prophets before the Babylonian Exile, because they were preachers of righteousness, placed God's judgments in the forefront of their message; most of them for the very same reason laid the greater emphasis upon the chastisement that must come upon Israel. They were all, no doubt, conscious that the principles underlying such preaching were capable of wide application. But with Amos, Hosea, Micah and Jeremiah the supreme question was how to bring home to the hearts of their own people the thought that their God is zealous for righteousness rather than desirous of splendid ritual. They were prepared to judge other nations in the light of the same searching, impartial standard; but as the righteousness of God was the central principle, the organizing idea of all their teaching, their own nation was their chief concern and the direct object of their ministry. Each in his own way might preach a strong sermon on the text, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith Jehovah." But in Nahum we meet a prophet for whom this is the one text and the whole sermon. The destruction of Nineveh is the theme, treated as a manifestation of Jehovah's power going forth in stern judgment, meting out

merited punishment to an exceedingly proud and wicked nation.

This is the one thing that is certain in connection with this small book; it stands out boldly in the midst of many minor uncertainties. The proud city of Nineveh is about to meet its doom at the hand of an avenging God; the prophet, recognizing the justice of God, and remembering the cruel deeds of the Assyrian Empire, feels justified in exulting over the terrible fate which he pictures in such a vivid, powerful fashion. The one aspect of truth proclaimed in such patriotic, passionate tones is that at last, even after long delay, complete punishment comes upon the arrogant nation that has despised God and outraged humanity. This, of course, implies many things; but we are now concerned with the prophet's special view of the world.

THE UNCERTAINTIES.

We are not sure just at what point within the latter half of the seventh century B. C. we must place this book. It is characteristic that the two lines which inclose the space are two acts of judgment, two chapters in the great world-story of divine retribution (iii. 8). If the writer is regarded as a successor of Isaiah, we must admit that he presents only a subordinate fragment of that great prophet's teaching. If we think of him as a contemporary of Jeremiah, we remember that it was a very different side of the truth that was emphasized in those dark days by that faithful, many-sided man. As for Nahum himself, we know him only by means of this brief prophecy and if it reveals vividness of im-

agination and intensity of feeling, it certainly shows an unusual narrowness of range in one who possessed great gifts, and who saw these scenes with the poet's eye. One would like to accept the suggestion that here was a man who belonged to "the lost ten tribes" and was not lost; a member of that section of Israel which suffered most severely from Assyria commissioned to herald the doom of the proud, cruel empire. There would surely be more than "poetic justice" in that; such a view may be permitted as a "pious opinion," but cannot claim to rank as a sure result of historical investigation. Two or three words and a few doubtful allusions must not be made to carry too great a burden. Absolute unity of authorship may be questioned even by men who are not given to eccentricities of criticism. The fact that there is no certain reference to Nineveh in the first chapter, and that this section is in its character a poetic and theological introduction — these and other things may admit of various explanations. But there is, at all events, a spiritual unity, a similarity of tone and atmosphere which justifies us in reading the great doctrine of an avenging God, in the light of the whole book. Interpreters may differ as to the point whether the prophet had in view the actual foe of Nineveh, the specific instrument appointed to execute the doom, or whether from a greater distance he delivered with tremendous force and clearness the God-given message. But none of these differences need dim our view of the particular prophetic idea here embodied.

A DEFINITE MESSAGE AND ITS TEACHING.

Nineveh was a great city, the centre of a splendid empire, an empire that had a long career of victory; and victory in such a case meant unbridled violence, cruel greed, insatiable lust. This empire then was one of the richest, most powerful and most flagrantly wicked that the world has ever seen. The story of this splendid tyranny and social corruption can be read in books and in the stones dug up long after Nineveh was dead and forgotten. The resurrection of Nineveh has only confirmed the story of its shame and proved that the prophet, with all his passion, was not guilty of exaggeration. Israel and Judah had suffered much from these arrogant, unprincipled tyrants; and it is quite natural that with the prophet's poetic fervour there should be mingled the fire of intense patriotism. As we follow his predictions we can hear the crack of the whip and the clatter of the chariot; we can see the victorious army rushing to the final attack, and see the multitude of corpses strewn in disorder about the path. The lion is tracked to his last lair and slaughtered without mercy. In the hour of doom strong men faint, and powerful defences fail. It was a bloody city, full of lies and robbery. The judgment is thorough; there is no healing of the bruise. No more shall the ambassadors of this proud city go forth to dictate oppressive terms to weak peoples. All that hear the noise of her downfall will clap their hands with revengeful joy. Her wickedness has passed upon all the peoples continually; and when she dies there is no creature to mourn. Men's minds are

filled with the solemn conviction that God has taken a great curse from off the face of the earth.

This is our prophet's one distinctive message; it was true, and history has abundantly justified it. We do not say that this was all the truth he held, but it is what he has given us with all his intensity of conviction and glory of poetic imagery. Hence the view of God given in the first chapter forms a fitting background for such a prediction.

> "A jealous God and vengeful is Jehovah;
> Jehovah is vengeful and wrathful;
> Jehovah is vengeful upon His adversaries
> And retaineth wrath against His enemies."

This magnificent theophany needs meditation, not commentary. Instead of "Jehovah is slow to anger, and great in power,

> And will not acquit *the wicked*" (i. 3)

it is suggested that we should read "great in mercy," and so bring the verse into line with a great number of other passages. But there is no documentary evidence requiring this, and surely the mention of power is most appropriate here. The message is that

> "Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small;
> Though with patience He stands waiting, with exactness grinds He all."

The punishment of guilt may be slow in coming, but it is absolutely sure. At the seventh verse it may be well to follow the Greek Bible and gain a better parallelism, thus:

"Jehovah is good to those who wait on Him,
A stronghold in the day of trouble."

But the Hebrew version, "Good as a stronghold in the day of trouble," contains a thought specially suitable in such an atmosphere; on the whole, it is the tremendous power and stern justice of the great God that is made prominent, and these are brought to bear upon a wicked nation. The distinction of our prophet is the way in which he makes this thought stand out in its solitary grandeur.

When we examine the differences that separate Nahum from those who went before, we must admit that they are great and of immense importance. Perhaps it is not well to press the point that he does not, like Isaiah, speak of Assyria as an instrument in the hand of Jehovah, for the time had come that Isaiah himself foresaw when God would cast away the rod He had used. It is significant that he says nothing concerning the sins of his own people and concentrates attention so exclusively on a foreign nation, and this at a time when Judah was preparing for the greatest catastrophe in its history. Assyria passes away, but Babylon takes the place, and becomes "the servant of Jehovah" to administer a still severer chastisement upon the people who had rejected so many privileges. It may be said that he had a specific message to deliver which did not involve the presentation of a large circle of religious ideas. Let us, then, remember that the proclamation of vengeance against the outside foe, pleasant as it may be to our patriotic pride, is only a small part of the prophetic activity, and that there is danger that our joy over

the enemy's fall may be greater than our hatred of the sins that God has so strikingly condemned. As a matter of fact, this was precisely the temptation to which the Jews yielded in later days; they made the contrast between themselves and the world absolute, privilege and blessing for themselves and severe judgment for those outside became the fixed and central point of their creed. Thus they teach us that one aspect of truth must not be separated from the whole to which it belongs, and in which it finds its explanation.

Nahum sets forth one form of the truth that the world is governed by a righteous God. Religion does not condemn a wholesome patriotism; through the religious influence that purifies and enlarges it, this natural feeling finds its fullest satisfaction. The indignation against tyranny and cruelty, the passionate cry for vengeance on those who, in a ruthless fashion, outrage all divine and human laws, is an expression of that justice which centres in God and which He will, in due time, vindicate. God does hear the cry of the oppressed, and He will destroy the nation that is built up by brute violence and lawless selfishness. But He will also cause the noblest nation to suffer for mistakes and pay the penalty of sins. In our own day, and within our own borders, we may see the principle which lies behind this prophecy working out its legitimate conclusion, a conclusion which works for righteousness and serves the interests of mercy.

THE PROPHET'S QUESTIONING

"Perplext in faith, but pure in deeds,
At last he beat his music out.
There lives more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds.

He fought his doubts and gather'd strength,
He would not make his judgment blind.
He faced the spectres of the mind
And laid them: thus he came at length

To find a stronger faith his own;
And Power was with him in the night
Which makes the darkness and the light,
And dwells not in the light alone,

But in the darkness and the cloud,
As over Sinai's peaks of old,
While Israel made their gods of gold,
Altho' the trumpet blew so loud."

—Tennyson.

CHAPTER XI

THE PROPHET'S QUESTIONING

(HABAKKUK)

This prophet presents his impatient question before the throne of God. He receives an answer which becomes a message to his time and which possesses perennial significance. We can scarcely call this "scepticism;" it is rather painful perplexity. His religious beliefs are clear and strong, but the question is how can they be harmonized with the facts of life? This problem is considered from the personal point of view in the Book of Job, Psalm lxxiii. and elsewhere, but here the significance is national. "Righteous" means the Jewish nation and "wicked" the Chaldeans. In later Judaism this contrast between the righteous nation and the wicked foreign foe was held in a hard mechanical fashion, but here it is set forth in connection with a great moral principle, which refuses to be fastened to any local limitation. Before the prophet went to his watch-tower he was able to affirm his living faith in a God who rules the world and whose eyes are so pure that they cannot look upon evil (i. 12-15). Indeed what would be the use of going to watch and pray if he did not believe in the Holy One who can answer his cry and explain the glaring

contradiction? "Wherefore lookest Thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest Thy peace when the wicked swalloweth up the man that is more righteous than he?" It is because the man's faith is so real and the facts of life also so real that the problem is so pressing and painful.

The splendid poem in the third chapter is a suitable supplement with its magnificent theophany and its beautiful expression of sublime trust in the God of salvation, but it is not closely connected with the main theme of the book; our prophet is concerned more with the righteousness than the power of Jehovah. There are many difficulties to be encountered in the detailed explanation of the first two chapters, and the settlement of these will naturally influence the way in which an expositor states the precise form of the prophet's question and answer; but the principle involved is the same, whether we regard him as dealing with the battle between the wicked and the righteous within the pale of his own nation or as concerned altogether with the pride and insolence of the outside enemy; or, in other words, if he is more closely related to Nahum than to Jeremiah. Among the true prophets we meet variety and individuality. Each has his own point of view, but they are all men who are seeking to interpret the facts of life in the light of God's righteousness. In this book we learn specially that prophecy has a strong relation to the prophet's own experience. It is not a message copied from a book; it is not a ready-made formula or even a carefully reasoned intellectual solution. It comes to him from God by a process that stirs into high activity all the

powers of his soul. Habakkuk wrestles with the difficulty that oppresses him; he prays and waits until he prevails. Like another true saint, he does not use his doubts to show his own cleverness or to disturb others, but waits until he has something positive to preach when even the perplexities viewed in the light of the sanctuary shall play a useful part.

"Jehovah, how long shall I cry and Thou wilt not hear?
I cry unto Thee of violence and Thou doest not help;
Wherefore dost Thou make me to see iniquity, and dost look upon trouble?"
—(i. 2, 3; cf. Psalm lxxiii. 15.)

Here we have weariness, impatience and perplexity. The prophet views with personal irritation the dark problem of life as it appears before his eyes. He has pity upon his own people; he knows that their life is imperfect, but when he thinks of the efforts that have been made to raise the standard of righteousness in politics and religion, he wonders that people worse than they should be allowed to punish them, and that the scornful foreigner's oppressive cruelty should prevail so long. It was just at this point that many broke down and said, "Jehovah does not care, or His power is limited. It is no use being so narrow; we may as well compromise matters and pay some little tribute to the other gods and receive a share of the success they have to give." It is when we realize the popular superstitions of the time that we can appreciate the loneliness, strength and grandeur of the prophets. A man

who was so hard pressed in spite of his noble faith could have some compassion on those who were so much weaker than himself.

We can understand the prophet's impatience. There may be weakness in it, but it is also tinged with piety and patriotism. It is not all personal vexation. There is much real zeal and jealousy for the righteousness of God. The prophet is just as zealous for the vindication of Jehovah's character as for the honour and safety of his own nation. But God's demand is that the prophet must have patience. It is the prophet's duty to watch and wait. He can utter his complaint. Certainly there is no book where man's freedom of utterance is more fully vindicated than in the Old Testament. Every mood and passion of the soul finds full expression. So long as it is not mere self-conceit or idle fretfulness it is good that man's complaint should be spoken and not cherished in sullen silence. When that is done the prophet can look longingly towards God. How dignified is this attitude!

"I will stand upon my watch, and set me on my tower,
And I will look forth to see what He will speak with me
And what answer He will give to my plea."

To such anxious hope and earnest expectation an answer is not lacking. The man who really desires to look at things in the light of eternity is lifted above party interests and personal prejudices, and can look out with a clear eye to discern the signs of the times, and interpret the movement of

history. The God-sent vision that answers the questioning of his own soul forms a message that is needed by all. The revelation is not for his private satisfaction. It must not be hidden. Let it be placarded in the streets in plain characters so that all may read it. God has His wise righteous purposes that are even now moving towards their fulfilment and hastening to the end. Though this fulfilment may seem to be delayed it is absolutely sure. This is the principle that needs to be proclaimed and understood. It is that the soul of the wicked man is not straight and square within him.

"But the righteous shall live by his faithfulness." Here we reach the heart of our prophet's message. If it seems to us to be simple and commonplace let us remember the toil and tears through which it came to him. It may be said that there is nothing new here, even according to his own statement. This was all implied in the belief in a righteous God that he professed. Just so. In the full, clear light of to-day it is easy for us to see that; but as a matter of fact it is only when a man is thrown back in doubt and agony upon his creed that he begins to realize its full meaning. The prophet joins in the most significant manner two things which Christian theology recognizes as two aspects of the same sublime reality, personal faith in the righteous God and the clear perception of the moral order of the world. The superficial view is to say that in the face of pride and tyranny God is silent; He does nothing. Even the man of faith in hours of weakness hears this sinister whisper in his soul, "God is silent; He does nothing." The deeper thought

that comes in the hour of meditation and prayer is that the Eternal is never silent, but ever-present and always active. It is true that the prophet refers to the future. The message is written plainly so that men's faith may be confirmed when future events cast their lurid light upon it, when it is read in the light of burning cities, and amid the crash of falling empires. He has also his great hope of a time "when the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea." But the great truth which has come to him and in which he finds rest is one of present application, namely this, that character decides destiny, sin is its own punishment. We are so familiar with this truth and have had presented to us in so many forms the fact that whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap, that we do not easily feel how living and original it was to the prophet in his hour of wrestling.

The prophet sees that the oppressed people may well take up a "taunting proverb" against the tyrants and cry against him manifold "Woes." In so doing they are not merely manifesting personal feeling; they express the judgment of God and predict the doom which has already begun to work itself out. Insatiable greed, unbridled lust, reckless extravagance, shameful cruelty, worship of one's own power; these sins against God and man carry in themselves the seeds of their own corruption. Just in so far as a nation is ruled in this spirit it is built upon a rotten foundation; its day of doom may seem to tarry, but it is in process of coming all the time. Its very success is its degradation,

even before the height of ambition is reached, judgment comes by slow decay or sudden calamity.

"But the just shall live by his faith." Isaiah teaches the same truth in a different form. When we meet it in Paul it has advanced into another atmosphere and taken on new associations. In the present connection it is simple and deep. It suggests that to be righteous is itself a strength and satisfaction. The plain statement is that the righteous man lives by his faithfulness. Righteousness exalteth a nation; proud iniquity brings it to the ground. This really means that the righteous man lives by his faith in God, by his perception of God's working in the regular movement of life and by his loyalty to the same. This is true when the dark disappointment and painful contradictions of life make it seem most uncertain. If we are to hold this truth firmly and with living adaptation to our own needs we must gain it for ourselves through the same patient watchfulness and persistent prayer. As applied to the life of the individual it receives in the lowliness and glory of Jesus its highest fulfilment and interpretation.

THE PROPHET'S PRESENTATION OF JEHOVAH'S PLEA

"For when man comes to front the everlasting God, and look the splendour of His judgments in the face, personal integrity, the dream of spotlessness and innocence, vanish into thin air: your decencies, and your church-going, and your regularities, and your attachment to a correct school and party, your gospel formulas of sound doctrine—what is all that in front of the blaze of the wrath to come?"

"A heart renewed—a loving heart—a penitent, humble heart—a heart broken and contrite, purified by love—that and only that is the rest of man. Spotlessness may do for angels—Repentance unto Life is the highest that belongs to man."—F. W. Robertson.

CHAPTER XII

THE PROPHET'S PRESENTATION OF JEHOVAH'S PLEA

(Micah vi. 1-9)

Professor Huxley, one of the most distinguished champions of the claims of science in the latter half of the nineteenth century, used to point to this great passage as presenting a complete picture of the highest religion. According to this authority, when the great word has been spoken—"He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth Jehovah require of thee but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God"—the whole secret has been revealed, substantially all has been said, yet the same writer could say, in a different connection: "The question of 'inspiration' really possesses no interest for those who have cast ecclesiasticism and all its works aside, and have no faith in any source of truth save that which is reached by the patient application of scientific methods." Our present purpose is not controversial. We wish rather to allow the prophets to speak for themselves and reiterate their high message, which is thus admitted by keenest critics to possess abiding appropriateness and perennial power. We cannot, therefore, consider how far the true prophet, in his reading of history and interpretation of life, in contrast

to the fitful follies of his contemporaries, may be said to have pursued a scientific method. There is, however, one bold fact which we cannot ignore. The prophet claims to speak for God, and to have received his message from the Eternal King who rules the nations and demands the intelligent homage of the individual soul. Further, the prophet in carrying out this conviction became in his own way a critic of the Church, to this extent, that he was an opponent of false ritualism and narrow "ecclesiasticism." Though gifted with great clearness of thought, he does not altogether fight his battle with those weapons of precision in which the modern man of science makes his boast; prophecy is not keen logic, swayed by cool scepticism. It is, rather, a living enthusiasm for the true religion, seeking to conquer superstition by bringing into the life of man a loftier, purer thought of God. The prophet speaks out of his rich knowledge of God and man.

The dramatic structure of the passage brings out this varied knowledge in a manner at once natural and beautiful. If dialogue meant stringing question and answer together, in a mechanical manner, it would be quite easy to write a dialogue. But to make question and answer reflect the actual conflict of life with its varying moods of superstitious fear and reasonable faith, that is not easy. This dialogue brings the life of man face to face with the life of God. Here we have real genius consecrated to the service of God and man. The prophetic inspiration manifests itself powerfully and the result is a dialogue, showing in its form a dignified simplicity, and presenting in substance a picture of the

patience of God wrestling with man's culpable ignorance and perverse unbelief. When we say, then, that the passage is dramatic we mean that, in spite of its brevity, it has a living movement; it is not dogmatic statement, but subtle suggestion of great truths; it advances with sure, steady step to its noble climax.

THE CONTROVERSY.

The voice of Jehovah calls the prophet to conduct this significant controversy. Then the prophet summons as witnesses the mountains, the strong foundations of the earth. Now the court is open, and we hear the voice of God setting forth His side of the case in tender, pleading tones. "O my people, what have I done unto thee? Wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against me, for I brought thee out of the land of Egypt and redeemed thee out of the house of bondage; I sent before thee Moses and Aaron and Miriam." The charge is not rudely rebutted; an attempt is made to break the force of it by the counter-plea of ignorance; lack of knowledge, rather than want of will, is the cause of failure. The people declare that they are willing to give any costly sacrifice if only they may gain the favor of their God. They evidently do not see that this is repeating the reproach in another form, suggesting that the crookedness of their life is fully accounted for by the dimness of the light that their God has shed upon their path. The prophet, therefore, closes the case with the great declaration that makes all evasion and excuse seem small; what is needed, he declares, is not more knowledge of historical facts, legal pre-

cepts, and ritual ordinances, but recognition of reality, insight into the nature of God's demands, surrender of the soul in that true spirit of loyalty which delights "to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with thy God."

FORM AND SUBSTANCE.

To have this and similar passages of Scripture printed in such a way as to make quite clear their literary structure is no doubt very helpful, and goes far towards suggesting the right interpretation. But admiration of the mere form, however artistic that may be, is not the supreme and final thing. We are now beginning to see that the points of view represented by the words "Revelation" and "Literature" are not contradictory, but complementary. The modern preacher may well learn a lesson from the ancient prophet in the art of presenting great truths in attractive, winning forms. Beauty and symmetry of form are by no means to be despised, even by the messenger of God; but let us remember that the greatest literature is never created by those whose chief concern is with the outward form. The living message moulds for itself the form that is appropriate and effective. Literature worthy of the name is the outcome of noble life, and it is in the movement of actual life that we meet the revelation of God. This passage of Scripture is clearly a revelation of life, on many of its sides. The several spheres which we define more sharply as nature, history and human experience are to the prophet made one kingdom by the presence of the divine life. Because the God in whom we live and move and have our being sheds

the light of His presence and the warmth of His love through all these regions, the literature which reflects the deepest life of man may be the medium of His revelation, and prepare the way for the highest manifestation in the man Christ Jesus.

Thus through an intelligent grasp of the structure of this passage we see more clearly the truths revealed. It reveals the heart of the prophet, the inward life of the man of God who hungers after the divine righteousness and sorrows over the sins of his fellow-men. It reveals a particular stage of the conflict between true and false religion; the prophet does not play with fancy pictures or suggest improbable suppositions; he is face to face with actual experience. Here we see how a certain class of men in that age by their superstitious bewilderment were driven to think of heroic service and supreme sacrifice. This dialogue finally reveals the gracious guidance, the large generosity, the persistent patience and pity of Israel's God.

This is revelation, and it is also a part of the history of revelation. The sun does not rise with one swift stroke and reach in an instant its meridian splendour, though sometimes it bursts with unexpected brilliance through the thick, dark clouds. Neither can the full-orbed truth come to a man or a people all at once. The path of revelation is, to those who can recognize it, like that of the sun shining more and more unto the perfect day. Many great teachers had to live and do their work before it was possible for a man to utter this great speech, and even in its noble suggestiveness it is not final; it marks a stage in the long upward journey; it is a

prophecy of and a preparation for the still greater future.

JEHOVAH'S PLEA.

The controversy between God and His people is often represented as a matter of universal interest and solemn import, but it gains here a special manifestation of tenderness. God draws near, not with the sternness that severe judgment seems to demand, but in pleading, persuasive tones. He could come in the terrible storm and make a quick end of an ungrateful people, but He prefers to knock at the door of the heart in this gentle fashion. He comes in mercy to His people; He will draw them with the cords of a man, and with plaintive appeal win them to penitence. At a time when religion among the surrounding tribes was savage and sensual, when many even in Israel thought of their God as a cruel, blood-thirsty tyrant, this is the vision of the true prophet. He sees a God of whom it may be rightly said, "Mercy is His delight." The question trembles through his soul as with mingled pity and indignation he presents the divine plea: "Have I, the living, helpful God, really been a burden instead of an inspiration and strength to you, my people?" Has the Father of the nation worn out the patience and power of His people by cold neglect or cruel demands? There is boldness in so presenting God's plea—the boldness of the inspired man, who knows how to startle men by the clear expression of their own thoughts. For such a man the truth must not be enslaved by any respectable, conventional form in which it has been enshrined. Let us, he seems to

say, carry our half-hearted unbelief to its legitimate conclusion and see what it really means. The clear statement of the question brings us a long way towards the right answer. Surely the suggestion is false; this God is the Redeemer of His people; He is the same Lord who inspired an earlier prophet to say: "When Israel was a child, then I loved him and called my son out of Egypt." (Hosea xi. 1.)

This principle of the highest religious life stated by the Apostle John, "We love because He first loved us," receives its full revelation, and its deep mystic meaning in the life of the Son of man and the teaching of His apostles, but in an earlier, simpler form it is found in the old Covenant. This evangelical principle that God's love is first, and that religion is man's loyal response to the divine compassion, received its first application to the national life of this favoured people. The great commandments, the "ten words," are not to be regarded as mere legalism; they should be read in the light of the sublime preamble, "I am Jehovah thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt." Thus in the early days men were taught to treat history as a sacred book, in which the love of the Eternal God was written in large, living letters.

The gift of great leaders is also a revelation of God, and lays men under heavy responsibility. No great nation was ever built up except through the toils and sacrifices of heroic men and noble women. Moses, Aaron and Miriam are types; they stand at the beginning of a great movement, and they are followed by "a great cloud of witnesses." Whether we keep a calendar and observe saint's-days or not,

we must try to remember how much we owe to the long succession of faithful witnesses, and we should often endeavour to realize how, through them, we are linked to the life of God and heaven. In the darkest days there were those who heard the Divine voice, who kept alive the lamp of life, and who "endured as seeing Him who is invisible." Not through silent, empty spaces does the great message travel down to us from the distant past, but through the sacred ministries of men and women who knew well life's perplexing problems and tormenting passions, and who knew, also, that in spite of their weakness God gave them strength for abiding service.

THE REPLY.

Can anything be said in reply to this searching plea? Is there any way open save silence and shame? The reply represents that the people are not ungrateful, but ignorant; they believe in God, but do not know the right way of approach to His throne. If the question, "What must we do to be saved?" can be clearly answered, they are willing to do anything that will win the favor of the divine King. They will give of their choicest possession, yea, even surrender their beloved children in literal sacrifice—"the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul." In our soft, easy times we are inclined to think that this is merely an effective rhetorical touch on the part of the preacher. Not so! Religion was in those days a thing of tremendous import, a matter of life and death to many people; they laid rich gifts upon the altars, they spent much time and strength in fasts and festivals. Stricken by keen

remorse or haunted by grim despair, they were willing literally to sacrifice their own flesh and blood. Cannot the great God, then, be content with this? No! The reply is hollow and helpless; it only aggravates the original offence. He has come to them in so many ways, and yet they know not how to approach Him! Faithful prophets have fought against their coarse superstition, and yet they cling to it, and allow it to bring blindness and confusion. History is full of the manifestations of His kindness, and yet they think of Him as seeking His own glory at the expense of their degradation. What they need is not more knowledge of ritual, but clearer insight into life. The sacrifice that God desires is obedience to the law of life, the self-surrender through which men come to purity, strength and usefulness.

THE TRUE IDEAL OF SERVICE.

"He hath showed thee, O man, what is good." The revelation has already been given in many ways. Our prophet does not claim originality, in the sense of uttering startling, sensational novelties. He is original in the only worthy sense; he can see into the heart of things; he can rightly interpret God's dealings in the past and apply this teaching to the living present; he can realize the deep gulf that separates popular superstition from pure religion. Religion is not to him a history, but a present life. He prizes the record of what God has done, because it is the revelation of what He is still doing. The Eternal God is always coming near with new messages of love and new manifestations of kindness.

The picture has clear, strong light over against

the deep, dark shadows. As a matter of fact, it was in the saddest hours of Israel's history that the radical opposition between the two views of God, the popular and the prophetic views of religion, came out most clearly. In the gloomy reign of Manasseh, and in the dark days just before the Exile, the popular superstition went to the most frightful extremes. Those who thought of Jehovah as a cruel, capricious tyrant were driven to dark deeds; they yielded to despair and gave way to debasing forms of idolatrous worship. But at that very time the sure word of prophecy reached its loftiest height; the righteousness of God was seen to be free from all national and sectarian limitations; the very disorder of the outside world became the means of making clearer the vision of the spiritual kingdom; the true nature of religion as loyalty to God and service to man shone out in clearer, brighter light.

In such light we must view this noble summary of prophetic teaching—"to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." Amos had cried, "Let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream." Hosea's central thought is, "I desired mercy and not sacrifice." Isaiah showed how the vision of the King brings that true lowliness which is the beginning of real greatness. Woven together these thoughts make a noble creed, which speaks of worship, communion and service. Personal purity and civic righteousness, devoutness of temper, and honourableness of life, humility in the hour of worship and strength in the face of duty—all this and more they suggest. Detailed exposition of such a simple, sublime statement

seems almost an impertinence. Sufficient now to say that reading it in the light of our Saviour's life, it may mean even more to us than to the ancient prophet, because our world is larger, our problems more complex, our temptations more subtle, our duties more varied. During the intervening centuries individual experience has been deepened and religion has assumed new social aspects, but if we will take these words to our heart with real desire to learn what is meant by loyalty to God and kindness to men, they will lead us into the way of sacrifice and of peace.

THE PROPHET'S KINGLY IDEAL

"It may therefore be affirmed that Christ's kingdom is a true brotherhood founded in devotion and self-sacrifice. Nothing less, indeed, would have satisfied those disciples who had begun to feel the spell of his character. A philosophic school or sect may found itself on the prudential instincts of man, may attach empty hearts, and attach them by a loose bond to each other. But a kingdom stands on self-devotion, and the hearts of Christ's disciples were not empty. They had not gathered themselves round him to be told how they might avoid the evils of life, but to know what they might do for him, how they might prove their loyalty to him. It was the art of self-devotion that they wished to learn, and he taught as a master teaches, not sparing words but resting most on deeds, by the Sermon on the Mount, but also by the Agony and the Crucifixion."—"Ecce Homo."

CHAPTER XIII

THE PROPHET'S KINGLY IDEAL

(Micah v. 1-3; Isaiah xi. 1-9.)

Many careful, conscientious students of the Old Testament regard it as proved that the prophecies of the Messianic King in these two books belong to the time when the Kingdom of Judah was destroyed and the successors of David no longer sat upon the throne. In that case these pictures of a glorious future were part of God's message of comfort to a broken-hearted and dispirited people. We cannot now discuss that question in detail; even if we were driven to accept that conclusion it would only deepen our impression as to the vitality of a faith which after such dark disaster could rise to such sublime heights. Our present concern is with the passage in Micah, but it is well to place by the side of the short suggestive statement the fuller, richer prophecies which are preserved for us in the book that bears the name of the great Isaiah. These prophecies have found an appropriate place in a book that is arranged for practical rather than scientific purposes. The picture of a lowly King from Bethlehem, the small country town, links on naturally to the teaching of Micah the peasant prophet, while the other pieces have a similar rela-

tionship to Isaiah's teaching and style. The question as to the exact date of such pieces is important from many points of view, but it is not for us now the chief thing, as we are not seeking to settle the precise course that was pursued by the development of the Messianic idea, but to examine in various lights the faith that lies behind it. When such prophecies were produced in Israel inspiration was still active; faith was living and creative.

The real moment of a nation's greatness is when it has a noble heroic past, and yet looks forward to a great living future. So long as prophecy was alive in Israel the past had real meaning and the future was full of hope. It is a striking thing, the significance of which we do well to ponder, that when Judaism rejected Jesus there was no more real growth. The possessions from the past were carefully preserved and mechanically copied, commentaries enlarged and rules multiplied; all this carried to wearisome lengths and ridiculous refinements, but no real creative force or divine inspiration. This suggests that they rejected the One who was able to interpret their noble past, and give it a real spiritual meaning, so that it should be capable of new and higher forms of expression. And yet the reason for His rejection was that he was so utterly unlike a real king; or, in other words, that He did not literally embody the prophetic pictures of the Messiah. Is not this a warning against crucifying the prophets by treating the noble poetry in which they have expressed warm living faith as if it were a narrow political formula, or a cold dogma?

The prophets were not simply preachers in the

sense of warning their fellow-men against immediate dangers and calling them to present duties. They were men with a clear, calm outlook into the future. If they did not construct almanacs in a mechanical manner, they declared the great realities of salvation which the future, governed by the gracious God who had guided the past, held in store. Their central purpose and constant aim is to make men feel the presence of a living God. To them history is a living movement hastening onward to its goal. They have the assurance that Jehovah will not utterly forsake His people, but after dark, distressful days the light and glory of His presence will be made known. But faith, when sketching its picture of the future, must draw its imagery from earlier days. The artist who paints a glowing picture of the future must dip his brush in the golden colours of the past. The real thing, however, is the faith; the form, though important, is subordinate; it may vary with the individual teacher and may take on various shades of local colour.

History repeats itself. God will again send David and Elijah (Ezekiel xxxiv. 24; Mal. iv. 5). That is true, but the repetitions of history are not mechanical and monotonous. The same principle reappears, but not in precisely the same form. New leaders and reformers come with the spirit and power of the old, but with their own individuality; with higher truth and loftier speech. David was God's gift to the nation. With all his imperfections he played the man and did a noble work. God will bring him back again, but the new David must meet new conditions, possess a wider dominion and exer-

cise a nobler sway. We cannot get back again to the old simple forms of life, but God will give purity of heart and real simplicity of spirit. Religion must face new sciences and meet new social needs; it must conquer and consecrate the noblest civilization.

From a small place and out of lowly circumstances the new king must come. From the simple life of the country new blood must come to revive and maintain the wasting life of the city. The prophet means that, but much more. Many of the prophets hated the life of the city, with its feverish rush, its sham splendour, its lust and greed and cruelty. They looked back to the simple village from which the great king had come as a place fit to be visited by God and to be made a source of new blessing. The prophet, even in his rustic preferences, manifests a great principle. He shows himself a true idealist and a real philosopher. He is not awed by pompous splendour; he does not worship bigness. Not by extent of territory, number of population or vastness of wealth can you measure the strength or glory of a nation. Bethlehem may mean more to the highest life of the world than Babylon. The prophet's simple ideal rebukes our noisy pride and pours contempt upon our vulgar worship of worldly success. This is the real simplicity and strength of faith, but we may see more clearly than the prophet did that God's new beginning is never a mere going back. God's new king is the heir of all the past.

The ideal of kingship is a noble one. The King must combine in himself capacity and character; service to God and kindness to men. He will be a

true shepherd of his people. How much the people had suffered from unworthy kings, men that were weak or wicked, princes that possessed no insight for statesmanship, no ability to rule, no power to inspire! No wonder that they were sometimes led to think of a king as a curse for their punishment, rather than a blessing for their healing. (1 Sam. viii. 7.) And yet they felt that a noble king would be a great blessing; one anointed by God and endowed with great gifts, to be used not for his own glory, but for the service of mankind, would be in a very true sense the representative of God on earth. To such a king shall be given widespread dominion and lasting influence, and to his people peace. "He shall stand and feed *his flock* in the strength of Jehovah, in the majesty of the name of Jehovah his God; and they shall abide and he shall be great unto the ends of the earth." The essential thing in these prophecies is the perception of the character of a real king, the ideal of faith soaring far above anything that the prophet had ever seen. God gave these noble thoughts to His hoping, hungering servants that they might proclaim the glory and prepare for the coming of the true King.

But there are limitations and these become a test of faith in after ages. This is a king like David, with nobler life and larger influence. But with all the spiritual beauty there is still a suggestion of worldly form and political surroundings. We can now joyfully recognize that no king sitting upon an earthly throne or political kingdom with its centre at Jerusalem can meet the need of humanity. We can find within the Old Testament itself large

universal elements that were striving to break through all such narrow bonds. We know that our Lord was rejected because He was a greater king than even the prophet had dreamed of, but from the vulgar eye His divinity was hidden by the lowliness of His life. The prophecy is fulfilled, but the fulfilment is a large and ever growing life; not an exact and literal reproduction of the ancient picture, but an incarnation of the spirit that was then seeking to express itself. The teacher who could say, "My kingdom is not of this world," and who inspired his disciples to utter the daily prayer, "Thy Kingdom come," will create for himself a wider dominion and a nobler spiritual influence than the world has yet seen. In His service men find freedom; at His cross they receive the gift of peace; through His inspiration they claim all spheres of activity for God; in His presence they learn that every kingly capacity brings power and responsibility for gentlest ministry.

THE PROPHET AS A FAILURE

"Jeremiah is not a master-spirit like Isaiah, who, since he had seen the king Jehovah in his majesty, paid respect to nothing else in the world, and faced even the blood and iron Assyrian with Olympic calm. Nor has he anything in common with the primitive Amos who is summoned to mighty speech by Jehovah's angry roar. He is most closely related to the thoughtful Hosea, they are both characterized by depth of soul and richness of inward life. Both suffer severely from the circumstances in which they are placed, but both refuse in the same dignified manner to be crushed by them, rather they gain strength to read in them thoughts of God which have become the imperishable possession of religion. As Hosea made use of the ancient history of the people in preaching to his contemporaries, so Jeremiah willingly appealed to the old time and directed the people to the earlier paths, to the days of first love, and set before them how much care Jehovah had lavished upon them through long centuries, so that he might constantly remind Israel of his duty. He placed before the eyes of the rebellious the ruins of the Shiloh Sanctuary as a witness of God's earnestness in chastisement. History should teach his prophetic opponents what a true prophet is, if they will not believe his statement."—D. G. Giesebrecht.

CHAPTER XIV

THE PROPHET AS A FAILURE

(Jer. xviii. 18-21.)

The life of Jeremiah has many sides, and here we meet the plaintive prophet in one of his most sorrowful and despairing moods. There is a "personal equation" to be considered in dealing with Jeremiah, as is the case with every man of strongly marked individuality. His utterances are necessarily coloured by his sensitive, shrinking nature. But there is no exaggeration in the statement he makes regarding the opposition provoked by his ministry. Many were ready to smite him with something more brutal, if not more bitter than words. The popular view of this prophet is that of a man who was always uttering violent denunciations against his fellow-citizens, or clamorously besieging the court of Heaven with harsh complaint against the stupidity and hard-heartedness of his hearers. That there is some truth in this view it would be vain to deny, but when we look at that side alone we do injustice to a great man.

This man's life and ministry would not have received such a large share of the sacred volume if it did not possess deep and permanent significance. Though a man of uncommon sensitiveness, strange

melancholy and deep despondency, he was also a man of firm faith and strong character. He is a type of the Highest Man in that for righteousness' sake he was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." This is not to claim perfection for the prophet; he had, indeed, the limitations and the weaknesses of the very qualities that made him strong. He may at times have given too much way to his naturally sad disposition; he may have failed to see the little good there was in his opponents; the completeness of his consecration and the fervour of his zeal may sometimes have made him one-sided. This is simply to say that Jeremiah was a man, but a sympathetic study of his career will show that even his mistakes spring from his intense zeal in the true service of God. Even if in some things his tone and temper seem to fall short of the Christian ideal, we are compelled to admit that his whole life is a strenuous struggle after righteousness. We deal now with only one aspect of that life, the one we have noted at the head of the chapter, "The Prophet as a Failure."

THE KIND OF FAILURE.

Our first need is to grasp clearly the nature of the failure which at first view seems to blight this man's life. It was not a business failure; that is a hard thing for an honest man. To sow and not to reap; to be diligent and yet unsuccessful; to fail in the face of fierce competition; to see the fabric that one has slowly reared suddenly shattered; surely there is heart-breaking bitterness in this experience. It was not merely political failure. The

prophet was a patriotic man who took the keenest interest in public affairs and who ought, on account of his ability and integrity, to have had political influence. But the loss of position and direct influence did not move him most. Others were welcome to place and power if only he could see right principles prevail. Neither was it the failure that we generally associate with the thought of poverty. It is not a pleasant thing to be poor, though it is sometimes easy to discuss that experience from a high poetic standpoint. The reality is grim and sad. To have one's poverty pressing as a daily burden; to be hampered by petty limitations; to be haunted by continual reminders of the hard fact; this also is painful even to the man who is seeking first the kingdom of God. This man did not desire great riches; a little of this world's goods would suffice for him, for he was quite content with "plain living and high thinking." Besides he seems to have had some little property, which in less troubled days would have supplied all his needs. When Jeremiah is regarded as a type of a certain kind of failure it is not for the purpose of giving prominence to any of these common forms of suffering. What is meant is that he was a rejected preacher, a man with an unpopular message. He was regarded as a dismal prophet, a public nuisance; a preacher who had no sweet gospel but only dark sayings and gloomy forebodings.

THE STRENUOUS LIFE.

In the thirteenth year of King Josiah Jeremiah received his call to the prophetic office (B. C. 629).

From that time to his death is reckoned about forty years. During his long ministry he saw five different kings on the throne of Judah, some of them having a short as well as a troubled reign. We have very little information concerning the first eighteen years of this ministry, but after that we can see him engaged in active work, denouncing wickedness, giving counsel and uttering warnings. Then we see him opposed by his kindred, persecuted by his townsmen, and threatened by the rulers. In later days the history is full of striking pictures, all of which represent some aspect of the great tragedy. Jehoiakim, the frivolous king, sits in his winter chamber, surrounded by time-serving courtiers, and he takes the book of prophecies, into which the prophet has poured his life-blood, and casts it bit by bit contemptuously into the fire. Again we see the prophet, the noblest man of his age, with feet thrust into the stocks, subjected to the most shameful degradation. Or once more we behold the true patriot thrown as a traitor into the foul dungeon. He proved that there are worse things than death, hence when death seemed very near his thought was for others, not for himself: "But as for me, behold I am in your hand; do with me as is good and right in your eyes. Only know ye for certain that, if ye put me to death, ye shall bring innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof; for of a truth Jehovah hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears." (xxvi. 15.) Saddest picture of all to see the venerable prophet, when he had declined to take refuge in Babylon, dragged off to Egypt by a few miser-

able, superstitious rebels to die in a land that he had despised. The brief sketch thus crowded into a few sentences represents a long life of incessant toil and constant pain. We think we have our share of sorrow, but how our small pains and petty persecutions shrink in the presence of this great martyrdom! It is true that we do now meet men who carry a tremendous burden of woe and disappointment, but a life so utterly sad is rare. Other prophets were rejected and persecuted, but with none of them was the long sustained battle on the whole so full of gloom as with this man, whose very name has become a synonym of wailing and lamentation. According to the ordinary social standard he failed utterly and hopelessly. When we think that we are unfairly treated, that the world is blind to our merits, and that our noblest efforts yield small results, we may do well to look once more on this picture of "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."

THE BITTER CUP.

This man's sorrow came through his faithfulness to God and duty. Many men bring poison into their blood, wretchedness into their life, as a consequence of their recklessness and selfish indulgence. But the prophet's sorrow comes in the main through love of righteousness and loyalty to truth. It was the call of God that summoned him to the battle. He heard a voice that must not be disobeyed; it was a call to continual crucifixion, but the man who hears that voice cannot be a traitor to his trust. As we see Jeremiah respond to this spiritual con-

straint, even when his nature shrinks from the ordeal, we may well ask whether in these softer days our faith has anything of that high, heroic strain. Are we prepared to accept misinterpretation and shame in our efforts to bring to men loftier thoughts of God?

Having grasped, then, the dominant principle of the prophet's life, mark the particular ingredients in his cup of woe. He had often to stand alone. It is true that he had a few disciples and friends who loved him as their own souls. Humanly speaking, but for that we could not have had the wonderful story of his life. When bitter hatred and unreasoning prejudice would have destroyed the record of his deepest thoughts and noble work, God used the love of faithful friends to preserve it and hand it down to us. But he had dark days, when it was practically Jeremiah against the world. Kindred and acquaintances went over to the enemy and even friends failed to catch the significance of his perpetual complaint. A man can have many so-called friends when he is popular and successful, when the crowds haste to his ministry and applause is plentiful, but if he will champion the unpopular cause and speak the unwelcome truth he must sometimes stand quite alone, taking counsel only with God and his own spirit. Is not that a hard thing for a man who by his very nature loves fellowship with men, as well as communion with God?

He, a lover of peace, was flung out into the brawling battle. A man of such sensitive spirit would have been more at home in seclusion, brooding over deep truths and writing tender, pathetic

psalms. Inclination alone might have made him a mystic, a man of the cloister, but the call sounded in him so clear and strong that he was compelled to be a man of strife. Some men love the excitement of battle. They need opposition to stir them and bring the best out of them. They are seen at their best in the fierce fray fighting for a great principle or defending a good cause. Jeremiah does not seem to have been of that type. He would no doubt have welcomed a smooth, peaceful message had such been possible. It was not exactly a pleasure to him to contradict common opinions and to tell the popular prophets that they were liars. It would be a glorious thing if the minister could truthfully declare that all is going well; that the people are interested in the deeper life of the Church, and intelligently anxious for the spread of God's kingdom. But how can the prophet say this when he knows that it is not true; when he sees so many spending their money for that which is not bread and their labour for that which does not satisfy? Jeremiah often cried out in severe anguish of spirit because he was forced to appear as a spiritual Ishmaelite, his hand against every man and every man's hand against him.

He was a prophet of doom. He saw the inevitable judgment coming quickly, and must herald it. Earlier prophets had their troubles and disappointments, but some of them were able to rally the people for successful conflict; and others had an inspiring note running through their severe judgments, but Jeremiah had to set his face like brass against all false hopes and deceitful expectations,

for in his day all hopes of victory were false. The nation had gone so far on the wrong road that only after a great judgment could there be a new beginning. By wise counsel and righteous policy much evil could be warded off. The rough downhill journey might be made a little gentler, but it was too late to turn away the judgment which was already at the door. Woe to the prophet who must herald the coming doom and declare to shallow, self-satisfied fanatics that the day of Jehovah is for them a day of defeat and darkness.

THE APPARENT FAILURE.

In the early years of Jeremiah's ministry there was a religious revival in Jerusalem. This took place in the reign of Josiah, who came to the throne as a boy and reigned on the whole nobly for thirty years. The movement was both a revival and a reformation. It received its inspiration from the "book of the law" found in the temple, and it marks a very important stage in the life of the Jewish Church. Much good work was done, the law-book was diligently studied, worship was reformed, many corrupt practices were swept away. It was a movement that tended to conserve the nobler elements of the old faith and to lead to still higher revelations. It is difficult to trace Jeremiah's precise connection with this movement and decide how far his earliest preaching was influenced and moulded by it. For our present purpose we must emphasize the fact that the prophet was compelled to turn upon it a stream of criticism and censure. It was soon evident to his keen insight that the work

had not gone deep enough. Re-action was setting in. The people, instead of pressing forward, were making a fetich of a revival that had almost spent its force. The goodness of the nation, like a morning cloud, is passing away. There must be a deeper repentance, and a new consecration. Policy whispers: "Why dash thyself in vain against this fierce fanaticism and earn once more the name of unreasonable fault-finder. It is just as well to hide the bitter truth in thine own heart." The true prophet cannot listen to this sinister suggestion. The message burns like a fire in his bones, he speaks it in persuasive parable or passionate denunciation, and is cursed for his pains; he receives the cross as his reward.

The little kingdom was at that time between the two great powers, Egypt and Babylon. Josiah, the one good king, had lost his life in a rash enterprise against the king of Egypt. This defeat caused confusion and many were driven to despair. Babylon would soon check the conquering career of Egypt, and between two such world powers what could this small kingdom accomplish? The alliance with Egypt had a fatal fascination for many, but Jeremiah saw clearly that there was no help in that direction. Egypt was a delusion and a snare, always unready and unreliable. The princes and politicians manifested that weakness which is in its results as hurtful as wickedness. They seemed to be able to trust in anything except God and righteousness. They were even capable of trying to pursue two contradictory courses at one and the same time. In the midst of the general confusion

Jeremiah's message grew clearer and stronger. He could even recognize the foreign conqueror, Nebuchadnezzar, as a servant of Israel's God, and declare that salvation could only come through submission. Restoration must be preceded by sharp discipline. There might be a great future for Judah's religion, but the thing to be made certain and emphatic now was the unavoidable doom, the Chaldeans at the door. Sad as it was, we can hardly wonder that the prophet was called a traitor; that men said he had no proper pride of patriotism and was willing to sell his country. When the crash came, when Jerusalem lay helpless in the hand of the Chaldean conqueror, the old man might have found comfortable shelter in Babylon, but rather than give colour to the false reproach he chose to stay and suffer with the miserable remnant in Palestine, and then we meet the last tragic touch, the prophet is forced to travel to Egypt to die in the land for which he had always cherished a profound contempt.

THE REAL SUCCESS.

When we review these facts we are compelled to admit that according to the world's standard of success the life of Jeremiah was a miserable failure. But it gives us pause to remember that, tried by the same worldly standard, the life of our Lord Jesus Christ also was an utter failure. He was only half understood by His friends and was crucified by His foes. The bigoted Pharisees, the sleek, self-satisfied Sadducees called that failure. Their final criticism was indeed true, but in a different and

deeper sense than they had thought of. "He saved others; Himself He cannot save." But how much failure is there in the sacrifice which has inspired the highest life of the world for almost nineteen centuries? Those who say that Jesus Christ has failed are only those who themselves have failed to grasp the meaning of His life and the mystery of His death. The fact is, that in the presence of great, heroic men we must revise our small standards of success and failure.

To examine further this question we must look at the man's life from the inside. The prophet did not fail there or he would have broken down and have fled from his great task. In the darkest hour he could say:

"Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain."

It has been said that blind belief will err as badly as blind unbelief. Certainly, but faith is not blind. Superstition may be blind; credulity may be blind, but real faith is by its very nature sight; insight into reality and clear grasp of spiritual principles.

Jeremiah saw a living God ruling the world. When everything seemed to go wrong and life was full of crookedness he did not say, "There is no God; only blind fate and the success of the strong." Though he was sometimes tempted to think that his God laid too much upon him, thrusting him into the forefront of the battle, yet nobly did he maintain his splendid faith. A man who could meet life-long

contradiction and speak always the painful truth which the world flung back to him with fiery scorn, and yet believe in God, was successful in the highest sense. He fought well one of the hardest battles that was ever appointed to a man to fight. He who thus believes in God believes in all else that is essential. Not by a shallow, smiling optimism could a man in such circumstances gain the victory. "This is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith."

Seeing a God of righteousness he looked forward to a king of righteousness. Several kings the prophet saw in Judah. For some he had genuine pity and sorrow; for others he was compelled to cherish contempt. The best king of the time also met a tragic fate and his defeat was to many the destruction of God's cause. The others were weak or wicked kings, with the semblance but without the reality of royalty. They are shadows flitting across the stage or weaklings tossed hither and thither by the storm. Jeremiah met these ill-fated men and though he longed to be loyal he had little satisfaction in such helpless, vacillating rulers. But he did not lose his faith in royalty. He looked upward and forward to a higher king. What he saw of feeble kings, of men who held the office though destitute of royal power, did not destroy his faith in divine kingship. Here he did not dwell upon the surface. At this point he did not fail. God will provide a righteous king, the true guide and faithful leader of his people, "The Lord our Righteousness."

Jeremiah saw a nation destroyed and a church

broken to pieces, but he did not lose faith in the reality and undying power of true religion. To-day the philosopher or poet can look back upon a long stretch of history and

> "Our little systems have their day;
> They have their day and cease to be."

To the prophet such a calm survey was not possible. The breaking of the system, imperfect as it was, was the breaking of his heart. From the depths of his own faith he drew the conclusion that though temples may be shattered and spoiled, though the sacrifices may cease and the people be scattered, religion cannot die. God's purpose cannot turn back or be defeated. It must go forward to its glorious fulfilment. The political kingdom may fail, but God can bring out of it a new church. There shall be a new kingdom and a new covenant. In the great future the law shall not be written simply on stone or in books. It shall be engraven on the hearts of faithful men. Here is faith that rises above appearances and laughs at impossibilities.

In this light we must surely revise our thoughts of failure and success. The real failure is the man who ruins his life and wastes his strength in wicked self-indulgence, the man who grasps and devours greedily all that the world has to offer. Though the prophet had not the clear hope for the future that the Christ has brought to us we can truly say that he lived in the light of eternity, and viewed in that light he is a real success. The Eternal God in whom he trusted does not cast such spiritual treasure into darkness and nothingness.

Though he goes down weeping to the grave he shall come again with rejoicing. In him also shall the great word be fulfilled: "The ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

ASPECTS OF A PROPHET'S LIFE
(JEREMIAH)

"A later generation, however, awoke to the virtue of Jeremiah's pain. Whether the figure of the Suffering Servant in the fifty-third of Isaiah be intended by the writer as an individual (as it seems to me we ought to conclude), or (in the opinion of most modern critics) as a personification of the righteous and suffering remnant of Israel, there is no doubt that the vision is partly inspired by the nation's appreciation of the meaning of Jeremiah's life."—Professor G. A. Smith, D. D., "Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament."

CHAPTER XV

ASPECTS OF A PROPHET'S LIFE (JEREMIAH)

THE CALL. (i. 1-10)

Jeremiah was a young man of priestly family who was destined to spend his life in opposition to the ruling powers in Church and State. The real reason of this is given here; the call of God laid hold of him mightily, setting before him a large mission and impelling him to undertake a difficult task. This was a memorable day; all his life grew out of it, as the plant grows from the seed. Predestined to be a prophet, he shrank from the prospect of life-long martyrdom when the actual call came. His sense of weakness and unwillingness, as well as of youthful inexperience, is expressed in the words, "I am a child." True, he was only a youth, but the life that is to be completely consecrated to strenuous service must be surrendered in its early days. Such a call has a directness and certainty to the man who receives it; to others the proof of its reality is in the life that comes out of it. Spiritual like natural forces are measured by the work they do; if we know anything of the life of Jeremiah, we know what strain and effort was involved in being true to

this vocation through forty long, painful years. Jeremiah was not the kind of man to take upon himself in a light-hearted fashion the high task of setting straight a world that was very crooked. The prophetic career had no natural attractions at that time for a young man of clear vision and sincere speech; the only explanation and justification for Jeremiah's action is that a burden was laid upon him which he could not cast away; the voice and vision which gave meaning to his life came from the King who rules in heaven and on earth.

THE PERSEVERANCE OF A SAINT. (i. 18, 19; xxv. 3.)

One of the great lessons of Jeremiah's life, apart from its direct teaching, is to be found in the fact that it sets forth so clearly the power of a living faith in God to sustain a man through long years of toil in the midst of fierce opposition. He is taught at the first that his ministry is to be one of judgment, and that he must expect constant persecution. The judgment may be delayed, but God will surely perform His word, and of this timid shrinking youth the Lord will make a strong fortress, an iron pillar against the whole land, against princes, priests and people. He is to demonstrate the feebleness of mere numbers and to show that one man with God in him and behind him is a mighty force. The real commentary on this is the story of the man's life, its persistent faithfulness and patient endurance. Whether he is meditating privately or preaching the truth openly, suffering the severest public shame or wrestling in secret agony, there is a firmness of character and determination of spirit which reveals real strength

behind apparent weakness. He is not a conventional picture of patience; wild words are at times wrung out of his soul by the fact that men misunderstood him and that he found it hard to understand the dealing of God; but the measure of his suffering is also the measure of his power to persevere. The firmness of the righteous man, the perseverance of the saint, the continuity of character—these are different phrases belonging to different periods of thought, but they all embody the same truth that the man who has seen God in true, clear vision is sustained in life's constant struggle.

THE ROOT OF THE MATTER. (ii. 10-14.)

The preacher does not play upon the surface; he penetrates to the heart; in all this wild confusion and many-sided corruption there are only two evils, and these are two sides of one great apostasy; the people have forsaken their God and hewn out for themselves broken disappointing cisterns. The man who goes to the central point with such clear vision and strong conviction cannot be contented by shallow resolutions or superficial reforms. Strange thing that Israel with such glorious memories behind (ii. 2, 3) should now play the fool, worshipping foreign gods and trusting in foreign nations. She will not learn from past experience, near or remote. (ii. 16, 36.) This is a matter for astonishment. To the prophet, who sees the strength, righteousness and faithfulness of Jehovah, it seems a horrible mystery that heathen nations should be so steadfast and Israel so fickle. He was right when he called it black ingratitude, base apostasy; but we do well to note

that we have here something which explains, if it does not excuse, the weakness of these people. The heathen religions were small, limited, sensuous, and in some cases even sensual. They suited the average man; they ministered to the passions of the crowd; they satisfied religious cravings without making large demands on the conscience. The religion of Israel was becoming more spiritual; the true teachers were advancing towards a nobler faith and loftier ideal. The mass of the people went back because they were not willing to go forward. A stagnant orthodoxy would not meet the case; loyalty to Moses and the earlier prophets meant power to perceive that the God of the past is the guide of the present; that purity of worship and righteousness of life are now, as ever, the sign of faithfulness and the source of strength. Those who could not rise to this lofty height turned from the fountain of living water to earthern cisterns; that is, they trusted in strange superstitions that could not satisfy and in foreign help that never came.

PIETY AND PATRIOTISM. (iv. 19-22.)

Not in any light, frivolous fashion does the prophet hurl this strong reproach at his people: "They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge." Because he sees the dread consequences of faithlessness and folly he is constrained to cry, "I am pained at my very heart"; or, "I suffer intense pain, O the walls of my heart!" There is nothing artificial or hysterical here; it is the agony of a strong man bowed under a weight of woe. In order to preach judgment he must see it, and the sight

is overwhelming. "I beheld the earth, and, lo! it was waste and void; and the heavens, and they had no light." Love has the greatest capacity for suffering; love of God and love of country causes this man to weep over the wickedness which turned the beautiful earth into darkness and chaos. He could not sit apart admiring his own virtue, and look with cold contempt upon social disorder and political corruption. He could not wrap himself in a hard coating of selfishness and watch unmoved the lingering agonies of a dying nation. His was not the piety that is content with hollow compromise and conventional phrase. His was not the patriotism that is satisfied with shouting against the foreign foe. Because he loved righteousness and loved his country, he saw clearly the coming doom, and shed these bitter tears. He teaches us the great lesson which mere politicians are prone to forget, that no nation, however great its privileges, can safely outrage the laws of truth and honesty.

THE PROPHET AS CYNIC. (V. 1-6.)

This passage might easily provoke the comment: "This is, indeed, a very cynical statement; the preacher is disappointed and soured; he rails at all the world, and thinks that there is none good but himself." Can the prophet be a cynic? No; that is the very opposite of the prophetic spirit: but he must fight that devil on the battlefield of his own soul. He has his hours of depression, when he thinks that he stands alone, that he is the only man in the city who has not bowed his knee to Baal; yes, he has moments when he is tempted to think

that God has deceived and forsaken him. Even Jeremiah did not carry all the piety of the nation in his own solitary heart. Had that been so, his message would have perished with him. But he sometimes suffered from the terrible pressure of loneliness and lack of sympathy, and not without reason was he oppressed by the scarcity of strong, sterling men. Men of insight, capacity and steadfastness were not common at that time. The broad places of the city were full of men, men who were noisy, pretentious and clever, but in the prophet's sense it was not easy in all the crowd to find a man.

Even the prophet is tempted to treat blatant folly with cynical contempt. This sensitive man looked out upon a strange, confused world. He saw men making fools of themselves. They listened eagerly to quack prophets and turned away from the saintly teachers; they sowed tares, and hoped to reap fine wheat; they lived ungodly lives, and expected heaven to aid them in the day of battle; they trusted in small ritualistic tricks, and forgot the great principles of justice and mercy. What wonder if the prophet in his darker hours should be tempted to cry: "What fools these men are, and am I not a fool to fret myself about them?" But to be cynical in the fullest sense is to lose all faith in God and goodness. In that sense Jeremiah was no cynic; we have seen him carry the cross and weep over the sin and shame of his brethren.

THE PROPHET AS A CONSERVATIVE. (vi. 16, 17.)

Jeremiah is radical in his treatment of religious and social problems; he shows that God will destroy

the most sacred places and the most ancient forms in order to save the truth that these were meant to represent (vii. 14). He can, however, adopt a conservative tone and exhort men to "ask for the good old paths." A true prophet cannot be a conservative in any narrow, stupid sense. The very essence of the prophetic spirit is the faith that the living God is still speaking to men, giving them new revelations and fresh guidance. A man who really believes that cannot be a slavish, superstitious worshipper of old things for their own sake. But he can quite consistently utter a powerful protest against those who recklessly break away from the simple life and sacred associations of earlier days. He can justly denounce innovations in religion which do not spring from any real principle, but are mere makeshifts, the refuge of men who do not understand either the teaching of the past or the needs of the present. In a very real sense, the only way to find the new life is to stand in the ways and ask for the old paths, the new thing that is both true and valuable springs out of the old in the way of healthy growth. The real principles that lie behind Jeremiah's preaching are old, and because he sees their living relation to the past he can bring out of them new applications. He has the strongest contempt for mere parrot-like repetition of other men's words; he insists that each prophet shall see with his own eyes, and deliver his own message, but no man is more faithful to the great teachers who have gone before. He was far from making a fetich of "good old times"; he would gladly have cherished larger hopes for the present if he could have found a reasonable basis for them;

but he would not, to use his own words, cry "Peace, peace, where there is no peace." The old faith in God, the old brotherly feeling, the old simplicity of family life, these must be preserved if the nation is to adapt itself to new circumstances and face new problems. Life is the real conservative force, the man that is alive can stand in the old paths and face new duties; by real progress he can preserve the permanent revelation.

THE PROPHET AS AN OPPONENT OF BIGOTRY.

(vii. 1-4.)

Here the prophet attacks the false dogma of the inviolability of the temple; this place the priests say cannot be destroyed, because it is Jehovah's palace, the dwelling place of the God of Israel. This belief is founded on a false interpretation of history, and is a distortion of Isaiah's teaching, yet religious zealots are prepared to make it a test of orthodoxy. Jeremiah is commanded to stand at the gate of the temple and declare that it is a lie, dishonoring to God and hateful to men. This is a serious business. The prophet speaks at the risk of his life. The best commentary is the statement in Chapter xxvi. There we can learn both the bitter feeling that was stirred and the dignified position taken by the prophet in a critical hour. Those whose only thought of Jeremiah is that of a weak, melancholy creature, who weeps on the slightest provocation, would do well to consider the calm words: "But as for me, behold, I am in your hand: do with me as is good and right in your eyes. Only know ye for certain that, if ye put me to death, ye shall bring

innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof; for of a truth Jehovah hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears." (xxvi. 14-16.)

Jeremiah standing at the door of the Jerusalem temple declaring the broad, simple demands of the moral law is a worthy successor of Moses; Jeremiah prophesying of the "new Covenant" is a real forerunner of the Christ. The narrow bigotry that he rebuked so fiercely consisted in divorcing religion from morality, profession from practice, worship from work. Past promises were perverted and present duties ignored. Under the delusion that there is one place where Jehovah must dwell, the temple and the city were regarded as safe from the assaults of foreign foes. "This is the temple of Jehovah" became a party cry. The sanctuary was worshipped and the God of the sanctuary forgotten or misunderstood.

THE PREACHER OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. (ix. 23-25.)

No ceremony or sanctuary can take the place of righteousness. It is always true that obedience is better than sacrifice. But behind obedience there lies insight, the knowledge of God's character, the sympathetic appreciation of His demands. A man may in a lowly spirit rejoice that this power of knowledge and obedience have been inspired in him by the spirit of God. From the prophet's point of view it is not worth while to glory in anything else. Wisdom, strength, riches—these are the world's treasures. Men covet them and trust in them. These gifts of God were treated as gods in Jerusalem

twenty-five centuries ago; men toiled for them and put their trust in them. The preacher declares that there is something higher; it is the preacher's duty now, as then, to uplift the ideal of righteous living and unselfish service. Men push on in their search for gold and fame, popularity and power, but in their serious moments they confess that without this ideal of faith and obedience life would be poor and meaningless. The kingdoms of the world attract us, but still we recognize that the supreme command is, "Seek first the Kingdom of God."

THE PROPHET AND PRINCE. (XXXVI.)

The prophet's reward was always the cross; he must repeat the unwelcome truth; he must bear the burden of misinterpretation. This is one incident in the tragic career: "Jehoiakim was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem, and he did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah." This is one of the kings to whom Jeremiah owed loyalty and service. Eleven years of restless, wicked life he lived, and then his body was flung over the walls of Jerusalem, "buried with the burial of an ass." As he comes before us here he manifests a bold impiety, a want of reverence for God and good men, that gives the key to his character. The difficulties of that time were great for any king, but for one who had no true faith and no real principle, no serious purpose, the case was hopeless. Note the striking contrast. The prophet has spent his time and strength writing out the message of warning, every sentence has been well weighed, every word represents thoughtful

conviction and tearful sympathy. This book has come from God. It has come from the depths of the prophet's soul. It was a gloomy prophecy, but it was sent on an errand of mercy. How is it received at court? The king, with cool contempt, cuts up the roll and casts it into the fire. The man upon the throne, irresponsible and irreverent, pours scorn and shame upon the noblest servant that God has given him; that of itself proves the truth of the prophecy and hastens its fulfilment. The truth remains though men shut their eyes to it; the prophet's message receives new life by the very attempt that is made to destroy it. The judgment is written in a book that no king can destroy.

THE NEW COVENANT. (xxxi. 33.)

The written word is a wonderful thing; it is marvelous thus to express and preserve thought by means of the outward visible symbol. Doubtless many things are written now that are not worth preserving, but the great helpful books are an important part of the world's treasure; the wisdom of the centuries is in them. Men have used many things for the purpose of writing, stones, bricks, skin, paper. Stories forgotten for centuries come to us now from the distant past written on those strange stone books of early days. But before any such material was largely used the mind of man was the means of preserving as well as originating the thought which makes literature. Stories, songs and proverbs passed from father to son, not by mere mechanical memory, but by living interest; the best thoughts and noblest truths were thus handed down from age

to age. Literature before letters. It may be that in Jeremiah's time some were beginning to make an idol of the book and exalt the letter above the truth. The book is good, but man must not be a slave to the book; the spirit that created the good book must dwell in each, imparting a life that is ever new and spontaneous. Here we have the prophet's highest word. Judgment is not all; there is mercy in the heart of God. After captivity there shall be restoration, a new beginning and a new hope. But how can we be sure things will not drift back and become worse than ever? Because God will give a new Covenant and write it not upon tables of stone or in book-rolls, but upon the minds and hearts of his faithful followers. The political order may change, but religion shall not die; it shall rather become purer, more spiritual, more personal. This is a lofty view of religion and a splendid exhibition of faith. This man by his life and teaching helped forward the movement towards a larger, freer faith. His prophecy of the new Covenant has received its fulfilment in the pure individuality of the Christian religion; and now our duty is to show that the new Covenant means both personal salvation and social service, a kingdom of God here as well as a hope of eternal life.

THE PROPHET AS PRIEST

"If the remnant of Israel was not lost among the heathen after the destructive catastrophe of 587-86, but found the way in which alone its future lay, this is really due to the service rendered by Ezekiel. In a wonderful manner he suited his activity to the changed conditions. In distinction from his earlier activity, as well as from that of all his prophetic predecessors that now exercised by him shows a fully marked individualistic feature. His word is now mainly directed to individuals and from many individuals he seeks to establish the sacred community of the approaching final time. In order to quicken the conscience he declares with special emphasis that every one stands in his separate personal relationship to Jehovah and that He will judge him according to his personal action alone, and in this way he contributed much to the deepening of piety; how earnestly he contended for the comprehension of the worth of moral personality is shown in a special manner by xii. 18-33. We may correctly regard him as, next to Jeremiah, the founder of the doctrine of individual retribution. In this respect a doctrinal dogmatic effort is clearly manifest in the prophecies of the second period. It is religious dogma and seeks to conceive the facts of religion in intelligible forms though the material at first shows itself inflexible. His legislative activity stands in connection with this."—Kraetzschmar.

CHAPTER XVI

THE PROPHET AS PRIEST

Ezekiel holds a peculiar position as a prophet who exercised his ministry far from his own land. He lived among the exiles in Babylon and addressed to them his message concerning the destiny of Israel. He belonged to an aristocratic and priestly family and it is probable that in youth he was engaged in temple service. Five years after his arrival in Babylon he was called to prophesy against "the rebellious nation." Thus he became a prophet, but though there was no opportunity for such ministry, he never ceased to be a priest. He stands at a turning point of Jewish history between the prophets who had in the first place heralded the judgment and those whose main business was to heal the wounds and minister consolation. His ministry has both these sides strongly developed. The prophet was taken to Babylon in the year 597 B. C., when Nebuchadnezzar carried off so much of the substance and so many of the best people of Jerusalem (2 Kings xxiv. 14). The two most powerful religious influences of that time had already left a deep impression on his mind. First, the religious reformation under King Josiah; and, second, the teaching of Jeremiah. It is evident from

Ezekiel's own picture of the new temple that the Deuteronomic idea of one central well-ordered sanctuary was for him essential to the preservation of pure religion and the manifestation of true faith. From his peculiar type of mind, as well as from the intensity of his faith, it followed that he had little sympathy with the variety and spontaneity of the older forms of religion. Hence he was one of the greatest among those who strove for strictness and uniformity in worship. Those who have studied most carefully the church life and apocalyptic literature bear strong testimony to the reality and duration of his influence.

The teaching of Jeremiah was evidently an important part of Ezekiel's preparation for the prophetic call. Verbal coincidences, which in this case are numerous and suggestive, are merely signs of something deeper. It may be well to note a few of them.

(*a*) "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy words were unto me a joy and the rejoicing of mine heart."

(Jer. xv. 16.)

"Then did I eat it (i. e., the book-roll) and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness."

(Ezek. iii. 3.)

(*b*) "And I set watchmen over you, saying, 'Hearken to the sound of the trumpet'; but they said, 'We will not hearken.'"

(Jer. vi. 17.)

"Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel, therefore hear the word at my mouth and give them warning from me."

(Ezek. iii. 17.)

(*c*) "The heart of the king shall perish, and the heart of the princes; and the priests shall be astonished, and the prophets shall wonder."

(Jer. iv. 9.)

"The king shall mourn and the prince shall be clothed with desolation, and the hands of the people of the land shall be troubled."

(Ezek. vii. 27.)

(*d*) "Then said Jehovah unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people."

(Jer. xv. 1.)

"Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it they should but deliver their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord Jehovah."

(Ezek. xiv. 14.)

(*e*) "Seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man."

(Jer. v. 1.)

"I sought for a man among them . . . . . but I found none."

(Ezek. xxii. 30.)

Jeremiah knew well that religion could not be kept alive simply by books and forms of worship. It must find permanence and progress through the

lives of faithful, intelligent men. Books were becoming more useful, and ceremonies could not quite be dispensed with, but these must receive their true interpretation through the experience of men who gather up the treasures of the past and march forward to a richer future. The strength of the movement shows that there were many men of this class, but Ezekiel stands out boldly as a type and leader who has given varied expression to their beliefs and aspirations.

A LIVING LINK.

He links together in his own life contrasted periods, different classes and opposite interests. Standing in the midst of the great period of judgment he affirms its absolute justice and helps to shape the new church that arises after the downfall of the nation. He is a public speaker and a man of letters; a prophet and a priest; a man of large outlook and yet a pastor ordained to watch over the souls of men. A man endowed with such varied capacities must be called a many-sided man; in fact the difficulty is to harmonize his ideas and show the unity of his life. We must be content to give fair representation to each essential feature without making too great a sacrifice for the sake of smoothness and system. Ezekiel plays so many parts that he can scarcely be expected to be in the first rank in any of them. Besides being a prophet and a priest he is a strange combination of the poet and theologian; he does not attain to the perfection of form characteristic of the greatest poets and he has not woven his teachings into a clearly articulated and logically

consistent scheme, but he loves a weird poetic imagery and he sees the importance of certain great theological ideas. Like all representative men he unites in himself the conflicting forces and complementary conceptions of his age. Hence he is by no means a man of one idea. He can hold at the same time thoughts which seem to small sectarian minds to be mutually exclusive. And we must admit that it is the most difficult thing to maintain a church system, such as that which he sketches, and keep alive at the same time the personal responsibility and spiritual experience which is so powerfully expressed in his teaching. If, however, our religion is to reach a high level it must by the power of Christian faith give appropriate expression to the deep solitary experience and the broad social communion. Similarly we may say that all the varied lines of ministerial activity which find a bold partial embodiment in the life of this inspired man have a permanent significance. He links together preaching and literature, prophetic zeal for moral principles and priestly care for ritual, a wide outlook on national destiny and a keen sense of the importance of individuals, a clear vision of the thoroughness of judgment and a noble faith in the new future.

THE BOOK.

The fact that writing has begun to play a larger part is symbolized by the form in which the call comes to Ezekiel. "And when I looked, behold a hand was put forth unto me; and lo, a roll of a book was therein; and he spread it before me, and it was written within and without: and there was written

therein lamentations and mourning and woe' (ii., 9, 10). He who received his call in this striking form has given us a book which in its very structure reveals the order of his thought. In this case it is probable that the book comes to us in an arrangement due to the prophet himself and controlled by a great idea. We have:

I. Visions, speeches and symbols from the time before the destruction of Jerusalem. Here the pictures are dark and the tone that of complete condemnation. (I—XXIV).

II. Oracles against foreign nations. These nations must be judged and punished in order to clear the stage for Israel's future restoration and blessedness (XXV-XXXII).

III. The picture of redemption and final blessedness. There shall be a national resurrection. The blessedness of the land shall provoke the comment: "This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden." The people shall have a new clean heart. The old sad days shall flee away at the words, "Neither will I hide my face from them any more for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord Jehovah" (XXXIII-XXXIX).

IV. Description of the new order of things when the restored tribes shall enjoy in Palestine a time of perfect service to God and peace with each other (XL-XLVIII). Even if the form in which we now find the book is not in all respects as it came from the author the general arrangement of the material harmonizes well with the progress of the prophet's thought.

THE PROPHET.

Ezekiel is remarkable for the sternness and steadfastness with which he declares that the judgment must be carried through to the bitter end. It was an unwelcome task, but having felt the pressure of the divine command he seems almost to have a grim pleasure in reiterating the mournful message. As he surveys the present condition of Jerusalem, or looks back upon the past life of the nation, he sees nothing to relieve the gloom. The people have been wicked and ungrateful from the beginning; they have been guilty of black ingratitude, shameless apostasy, abominable idolatries. We are tempted to call the prophet dogmatic and doctrinaire; he applies his standard in such a hard absolute fashion. He has not the varied perspective of Isaiah nor the tender sensitiveness of Jeremiah. He had his hours of excitement and depression, but he is always marked by a certain hardness and inflexibility. All his visions, parables, riddles and poems tell the same tale of Israel's sin, shame and sorrow. In language deemed expressive at the time, but sometimes repulsive to our modern taste, the unfaithfulness of Judah is vividly portrayed. It is often difficult to say whether the visions are actual and the actions real; but the meaning of all this strange symbolism is clear; the nation has come to the close of a long career of inexcusable wickedness. There is no hope; only doom certain and complete. This is the immediate outlook given by a prophet who judges all the people and measures all its history by the same absolute standard.

THE PREACHER.

Such a course of prediction, especially when justified by events, could only lead to humiliation and despair. How can men cherish any hope when they feel that the woes accumulated from centuries of sin and shame come upon them with crushing weight? It is scarcely surprising if men in such circumstances cry, "the fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge." Indeed there is some truth in the sinister proverb. In true preacher fashion Ezekiel will take another fragment of truth and wield it to meet this case. Each man is responsible for his own action and will receive from God according to his own deeds. "As I live, saith Jehovah, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways, for why will ye die, O house of Israel!" Here is recognition of the solitary individual life, faith in the possibility of conversion. The form in which the thought is worked out is very bold and it seems to take each soul and cut it clear away from all relationships of past and present. But that is the preacher's business, to set forth strongly the neglected truth. If the preacher cannot set forth this truth of individual responsibilities in all its relationship and show all its consequences it is well that he should fling it forth in a way that will check despair, quicken thought and inspire faith. The fact that he has preached such a powerful sermon on the text, "visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children," drives him to assert

with equal boldness that the individual man can throw off the dead weight of the past and lay hold on present mercy. Immediate impressiveness rather than systematic consistency is the preacher's main business. Ezekiel with all his capabilities was not a philosopher and probably did not feel as much as we do the pressure of inconsistency in the varied elements of his thought.

THE PASTOR.

To save the church, when the nation had made such terrible shipwreck, something more was needed than elaborate denunciations and grim symbols of punishment. Some attempt must be made to gather together "the remnant," to give new hope to those who were destined to keep alive the spiritual idea. Therefore pastoral responsibility is set forth in a special manner. The prophet is "a watchman" set to blow the trumpet and warn the people of coming danger. This view appears in Amos with intense vividness and spirituality, but in Ezekiel the reference is to the particular individuals who compose the community rather than to the nation as a whole. We are reminded of Baxter's great discourse, "The Reformed Pastor," which was also delivered in a time of transition and persecution.

"When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die, and thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way; that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thy hand" (XXXIII:8). This commission given in such terms makes "the watchman"

feel that it is a very solemn thing to stand between men and their God, weighted with responsibility on one hand and exposed to suspicion and scorn on the other. Yet with all his seriousness the prophet had a certain popularity on account of his skill in speech; even to shallow people there was a charm in his intense earnestness and his pictorial style. The people talked about him "by the walls and in the doors of the houses" and said, "Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from Jehovah"; or, in modern phrase, let us go and hear the latest thing in the way of a sermon. To have the outward form admired and the inward message rejected is a tragic fate for the preacher, but not peculiar to any age. To compliment the preacher on his elocution and treat his words as trifles is the height of cruelty. "And lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument; for they hear thy words but do them not." (xxxiii, 32.)

THE POET.

It is quite true that he was a singer and a painter, a master in the use of words, chanting solemn songs or creating gorgeous suggestive pictures. In these days of exact science and prosaic materialism it might be well for us to take a little more interest in and cherish a stronger sympathy for these antique poems and symbolic pictures. From the artistic point of view they may often be rude, and sometimes grotesque, but the main thing is the moral principle; the pictures are not valued

for their own sake but as illustrations in a powerful sermon. This wealth of oriental imagery may be foreign to our taste, but it was very dear to good men in those days and has exerted a wonderful influence over later literature, and still in indirect ways it moulds the thoughts of men concerning death and judgment. Many comparisons might be drawn similar to that suggested by IX:4, and Rev. VII:3. Ezekiel delights in parables, riddles, songs, dirges and elaborate pictures; some complain that these are artificial and barren, but in all cases they will reward a careful, sympathetic study. For his marvelous descriptive powers one should read his predictions concerning foreign nations; he decorates the victims magnificently before announcing their doom. These nations viewed in this rich light seem to have some excuse for their pride, but they have ill-treated the chosen people and their unchastened arrogance is a mortal sin against the supreme God, therefore they must die.

THE PRIEST.

In and through all Ezekiel continued to be a priest. Amos and Isaiah lay special stress on morality as opposed to ritual; Zechariah and Haggai are zealous supporters of the claims of the church and the needs of the sanctuary; Ezekiel comes between these two epochs and stands between these different classes of prophets; he continues to be a priest while far from the sanctuary and exercising the ministry of a prophet. His great predecessor, Jeremiah, sprang from a priestly family but devoted himself entirely to the work of

preaching; the temple was still standing but he had evidently lost all hope of cleansing and refining it, and in his teaching there is nothing of a distinctive priestly character. Ezekiel, though he lives in Babylon, where there is no Jewish temple, never loses his priestly instincts. His vocabulary is full of ecclesiastical phraseology; he is much concerned with "the clean" and "the unclean", "the sacred" and "the profane". It may not be fair to judge him from the modern point of view as to the distinction between the "moral" and the "ceremonial", "ritual" and "conduct"; to him these are elements which must be blended into a consistent life, a life which links earth to heaven and men to each other. To sketch a restored land, a glorified nation, a new temple, was at such a time a great act of faith, but the *form* in which it appears, the clothing of the idea, shows how thoroughly the priestly view of life dominates the man's mind. To Ezekiel the form is essential, it is not mere drapery. His picture of the new temple is an important part of his polemic against impure worship, and it had a great share in the development of later Judaism. To us it may seem foreign and remote, but it was a fitting vehicle for the expression of his hopes. We cannot in the face of all his strong sermons class Ezekiel as a mere ritualist, but we must confess that "the Church" as an ecclesiastical organization is for him central and supreme. This side of the truth still needs representation and if we are compelled to regard this prophet's picture of a religious nation as local and mechanical, this is because of our ap-

preciation of other and higher elements in his teaching.

THE THEOLOGIAN.

If Ezekiel felt himself driven to act as architect of a new temple it was not because he was destitute of religious ideas and unable to live without the material sanctuary. He helped to stimulate theological activity by the very roughness of his system of thought, the force by which disjointed fragments of truth were flung out into a world that had lost its standards. There is strength and it may be something of arbitrariness in his thought of God. Jehovah is the absolute ruler who "sanctifies Himself", that is, reveals His nature for the honour of His own name. There is a certain stiffness in the manner in which this truth is presented. We do not find the mingling of tenderness and sublimity that marks the fortieth chapter of Isaiah; and yet in a different way the same elements are in both. Ezekiel, after denouncing the human shepherds who neglect the flock, can give us an attractive picture of God as the good shepherd. (XXXIV: 12.) God can do all things, therefore no hindrance can stand in the way of the new Kingdom and Church that are to glorify His name. This is real faith, though there is much national limitation in the mode of its expression. At times, however, it reaches the highest union of sublimity and pathos. When the prophet sees the valley of dry bones he hears the question, "Son of man, can these bones live?" There is reverence as well as faith in the reply, "O, Lord Jehovah, thou knowest".

There is faith also in the indication of the means to be used. "Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, "O, ye dry bones, hear the word of Jehovah." God can make a new nation, He can cause its scattered members to arise out of the dust in response to the living word. The Church will not become a cold, stiff, mechanical system so long as this faith is cherished and expressed in beautiful forms. Ezekiel may be a father to a class of "formalists", but that will only be if men are content to ignore his noblest teachings. No prophet gives a fuller, more varied description of the work of "the Spirit". To this divine energy he traces his own prophetic activity, "the spirit entered into me, as he spoke to me" (II:2; III:24; XI:5). He knows what we call "repentance", since he can say, "Make you a new mind and a new spirit; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" (XVIII:31.) In connection with the promise of restoration there is the suggestive statement, "I will give them a new mind and put a new spirit within them" (XI:19). And in our final judgment of Ezekiel's view, it must never be forgotten that besides giving us a model of the restored land with its temple in the centre, and sweet idyllic pictures of the fruitfulness and beauty of the land, he has furnished the charter of the new nation in these terms:

"And I will sprinkle clean water upon you, that you may be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of

flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them." (xxxvi:25-27).

In order to do justice to the prophet it is not necessary to read into these great words the clearer and richer thought of spiritual regeneration which is the centre and glory of the Christian faith, but we must acknowledge that this man, with all his care for ritual and genius for organization, saw the need of inward renewal, and in his own way longed and prepared for the higher command, "Ye must be born again." His ecclesiastical system is impossible to us now, but we may possess the same living faith in a God who can create a new church which shall hold a lofty central position even in our modern life. In dealing with foreign nations Ezekiel does not strike the missionary note, the judgment upon the peoples is simply to make known Jehovah's justice and prepare the way for Israel's prosperity (xxxviii:25-26). At that point it may be said that he stops short of what is implied in his own teaching; that may be so, but with regard to his successors, while there were some who exalted the ecclesiastical and exclusive elements in Ezekiel's system, there were others who saw clearly that such truths as individual responsibility and the inwardness of religion cannot be confined to any one church or nation. This prophet had immense influence over his immediate followers; since then he has been neglected and now, though he is not the most attractive of the prophets, we are slowly learning that he demands careful consideration and is worthy of reverence.

THE PROPHET'S PARABLE

"The artist is a witness to the truth; or he will never attain the beautiful. So is the agriculturist; or he will never reap a harvest. So is the statesman, building up a nation's polity on the principles which time has proved true, or else all his work crumbles down in revolution; for national revolution is only the Divine Rejection stamped on the social falsehood which cannot stand. In every department of life man must work truly as a witness. He is born for that, nothing else; and nothing else can he do. Man the Son can do nothing of Himself, but that which He seeth God the Father do."—F. W. Robertson.

CHAPTER XVII

THE PROPHET'S PARABLE

(Isaiah v. 1-7; xxviii. 23-29. Ezekiel xv.)

Hosea, speaking in the name of Israel's God, says: "I have also spoken unto the prophet, and I have multiplied visions, and by the ministry of the prophets have I used similitudes." This speech of God to the prophets was a sustained and varied process, as we may see from a study of the way in which they interpreted life and imparted truth to the people. The prophets spoke many things in very plain language; they smote the wickedness of their time in words that could not be mistaken; but in seeking to present positive truth in attractive suggestive forms they often preferred the "similitudes," which great teachers use so effectively and which all classes of hearers can appreciate. The Old Testament has suffered much from disconnected treatment and wild allegorical interpretations, but the most careful examination of this great literature often brings to our minds the words that Tennyson applies to the Great Teacher:

"For Wisdom dealt with mortal powers,
Where truth in closest words shall fail,
When truth embodied in a tale
Shall enter in at lowly doors."

There are many parables in the prophetic writings. One of them, the parable of the Vine, will in this chapter claim the greater part of our attention; but in the first place a few words may be given to the parable of the Husbandman, which we find in the twenty-eighth chapter of the book which bears the name of Isaiah.

This parable may have been spoken by Isaiah to vindicate God's varied dealings with the nation, and the changing moods of his own ministry. If, however, the view is accepted that it is a later production, meant to show that all past judgments were a preparation for future blessing, the central principle is the same—namely, that we must not attribute to God's government a senseless mechanical uniformity. The subordinate suggestions also are not seriously affected by the difference of view as to the exact period in which the parable must be placed. One of these is that the work of the husbandman is sacred and symbolic: it is a parable of God's dealing with nations and men, as well as of the faithful ministry of a wise teacher. The reason of this is that the farmer is taught by God how to manage different seeds and plants: each husbandman is trained by Jehovah, taught by his God (26). His work shows knowledge, which manifests itself in adaptation to each particular case. "This also cometh from Jehovah of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom" (29). The Hebrew laid more stress upon practical wisdom than on keen intellectual analysis or brooding mystic meditation. Wisdom was careful thought, issuing in strong, consistent living. This was God's

gift. It might be handed down by tradition or be learned by sharp personal experience; but it was not the less given through the guidance of God; it was in a very real sense a revelation. We need to go back to this thought of one God and one world. No! there is no such thing as going back; we need to go forward and hold this view in a still loftier fashion that we may claim all spheres of life for God. The poet and the engineer, the philosopher and the farmer—all these varied thinkers and workers must, in order to attain the highest service, link their work to the forces which come forth from God and constantly express His will.

The point of supreme importance is that different methods are used to meet varying needs, but all for the same purpose. No living ministry follows a cast-iron uniform rule of procedure and treats everything in the same manner. The farmer may level the soil and smooth it as well as tear it up; he does not keep on ploughing all the time, he can sow and reap; he does not thrash all kinds of grain in exactly the same way, he has an appropriate method for each. You do not call this fickleness and inconsistency on the part of a farmer; you recognize it in his case as a manifestation of wisdom on the part of a man taught by God. The farmer is always seeking the same thing, fruitfulness and blessing as the result of toil; there is no real change of plan in his work, only wise adaptation of means to ends. From this we may learn what is meant by the steadfastness of God and the consistency of the true teacher. The different seasons that God gives in the world of nature all

work toward the harvest. His different treatment of nations and the varied discipline of the individual life is all for the same end. He is ever working for righteousness and character. If Samaria is destroyed and Jerusalem is preserved it is for the same purpose. If Jerusalem is protected in one century and delivered over to the enemy in the next it is all in pursuance of the same plan. If the prophet's message is in one age mainly of denunciation and in the next chiefly of consolation there is no real contradiction, the same principle is at work through all the changes. The changeableness of God is the adaptation of love and righteousness to the changing needs of men. He does not care for dead uniformity or surface consistency; to judge His plan we need deep thoughtfulness as well as devout reverence. Our shallow criticisms may simply show our own conceit instead of disproving the constancy which hides inflexible purpose behind seeming caprice. We may find everywhere illustrations of the fact that God fulfils himself in many ways, but especially in the history of that redeeming mercy which finds its highest manifestation in Jesus Christ.

THE PARABLE OF THE VINE.

The vine played a great part in the life of Palestine, and it is quite natural that it should be used in literature as the symbol of peace and blessing, fruitfulness and joy. In the prophets the thought of God's ill-requited toil and care is represented by the disappointed husbandman who looks in vain for the fruit from the vine upon which he has be-

stowed painful labor. We meet this similitude first in Hosea in a very brief form, "Israel is a luxuriant vine," but the fruit is not of the right kind—it is a luxuriance of impure worship, not of noble deeds. The next time we meet this figure it is in the form of a finely worked out poetic parable, one of the noblest pieces that we possess from the pen of the great Isaiah. It is even supposed that in the early years of his ministry the prophet appeared at one of the festivals to sing before one of the assembled crowds the story of Jehovah's love, patient ministry, the bitter disappointment; that is uncertain, but it is quite clear that the union of privilege and responsibility here finds richer and sweeter expression. Jehovah is reluctant to condemn and destroy that which he has created and cherished, but what can He do?

"And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem,
And men of Judah,
Judge, I pray you, betwixt me
And my vineyard.
What could have been done more to my vineyard
That I have not done in it?
Wherefore when I looked that it should bring forth grapes
Brought it forth wild grapes?"

Here is a touching parable which in its first movement must make a powerful appeal to the audience, quickening interest and rousing curiosity, but the orator is determined that his speech shall not minister to mere entertainment; there shall be no doubt as to the meaning and application of this

sermon. The closing sentence is something that all can understand and that they cannot easily forget.

"The vineyard of Jehovah of hosts is the house
of Israel,
And the men of Judah His pleasant plant,
And He lcoked for judgment, but behold oppres-
sion,
For righteousness, but behold a cry."

After this we find the Vine parable in many varied forms of song, sermon and prayer. In Isaiah xxvii. 2-5 there is one of a different tone, which probably belongs to a much later time.

"A vineyard of wine, sing ye unto it!
I, Jehovah, do keep it;
I will water it every moment;
Lest any hurt it,
I will keep it day and night.
Fury is not in Me:
Would that the briers
And thorns were against Me in battle!
I would march upon them,
I would burn them together,
Or else let him take hold of My strength,
That he may make peace with Me;
Let him make peace with Me."

One parable is a message of reproach and condemnation, the other a song of comfort and cheer. In Psalm lxxx. the same sweet symbol is used as a plaintive prayer; the blessing of God which can be made the basis of powerful exhortation can also

serve as the reason for earnest appeal. He who has shown such grace in the past will surely have pity on the penitent church. Defeat and disaster have lessened pride without quite destroying faith.

"Thou broughtest a vine out of Egypt:
Thou didst drive out the nation, and plantedst it."

"Why hast Thou broken down her fences,
So that all they which pass by the way do pluck her?"

Through what terrible experience the nation had to pass and in what severe tones the prophet spoke before the time of comfort and hope dawned may be seen from the words of Jeremiah: "Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed; how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me"? (ii. 21). Nowhere is the judgment more severe and the threat of destruction more complete than in the fifteenth chapter of Ezekiel, where the prophet hears the sharp question, "What is the vine tree more than any other tree, the vine branch which is among the trees of the forest?" If men still cling to the idea that election is a coarse mechanical thing, that Jehovah is bound to protect and restore the nation because it is his heritage, the vine of his planting, then they must be reminded once more why a vine is planted and what is its true place among the trees of the forest. What is the use of a vine? You cannot build ships with its wood, or make houses from its timber; it is not fit to be used for any article of furniture or common utensil. It is not the kind of

wood that one would choose for the making of a paltry peg. What is the use of a vine, especially one that has been thrown into the fire and burnt at both ends? Can anything more be done except to cast it again into the fire and let it be completely consumed? But if the vine is not for these purposes is it not one of the noblest trees from the point of view of fruit-bearing? That is quite true; but this vine has not borne the right kind of fruit, and here we meet the real point of the parable, a point that is made more prominent by solemn silence than by eloquent speech. If it is a question of fruit, then the less said of it the better; history has justified Isaiah's parable. Jehovah has visited the vine in anger for the very reason that after all His care, it did not bear good fruit. Israel was from the first meant for fruit-bearing, to bring forth in her own time and way the fruits of the Spirit, to be an example of a nation loving truth and seeking righteousness. But she did not covet earnestly the best of gifts; she desired to be like the other trees of the forest. She envied the political pretensions and military power of the great Oriental empires. That vain splendour and such short-lived power were not meant for her; in her high message and spiritual vocation there was greater glory and nobler influence. Judged from the material and political point of view Israel was contemptible; she must seek her greatness elsewhere or die. The vine, with its rich cluster of luscious grapes, has a grace and beauty of its own; but the barren vine pretending to be a cedar of Lebanon is a ridiculous sight. The church still needs this lesson; she must be true to her own

life, active in her own sphere, fruitful in the God-appointed way. If she will leave her "vine which cheereth God and man, and go and move to and fro over the trees" she may gain a little temporary splendour, while losing the beauty and power of real spiritual life. The influence of real faith, the gentle power of genuine goodness, the indirect rule of clear, truthful testimony, the silent, effective force of character—through these the church must work, and these spiritual weapons have lost none of their special significance and supreme power. But if she craves the crown and the purple, if she is dazzled by the glamour of the visible sceptre, if she covets the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, then the voice may speak again in the same piercing tones, "What is the vine tree more than all the trees of the forest?"

THE PROPHET'S MESSAGE OF COMFORT

"If Israel had been merely a race like others it would never have survived this fearful catastrophe and would have disappeared in the Babylonian Exile. But Israel was the bearer of an idea; this was not to be annihilated with the State, and its external destiny was not closed with its political life. On the contrary. It seems as though only now, when the body was dashed to pieces, was the spirit really able to develop unhampered. The death that Judah died was a death suffused with dawn."—Professor C. H. Cornill, "The Prophets of Israel."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE PROPHET'S MESSAGE OF COMFORT

(Isaiah xl.)

This prophecy is full of voices; we can hear these voices wail or sing, we can catch the call that addresses the conscience, and listen to the soothing strain that tenderly appeals to the weary heart. There are also echoes, reflections of what the heathen cry in their confusion or the Israelites mutter in their despair, but the dominant sound is the voices of prophets and heralds bringing a great message of peace and blessing from the redeeming God. This is a noble piece of literature, it clothes the appropriate messages in such winning forms that the sermon which did its own work effectively has become a thing of beauty and a joy forever. The voice has not died away or spent its force. Before it became sacred literature it was a living message, coming with persuasive power from the depths of an inspired soul. We are thankful for the book, and because we believe in God we still have faith in the preacher's voice. Let men denounce empty babble with all the cynical bitterness they can command, it will still remain true that God uses the human voice as His instrument. Smart writing and showy pictures cannot superannuate the voice that

has a soul behind it. The inspiring tones that call to battle, the flaming speech that denounces sin, the calm, persuasive plea, the sympathetic words that dispel doubt and check despair, these are always needed. They never did a nobler work than when they bound up the wounds of a broken-hearted nation, and declared that the community in banishment and disgrace was called to new life and higher service.

We cannot say of this preacher that he is "a voice and nothing more," for he is very much more, he hears many voices and he brings a manifold message. Though we do not know exactly where he lived and how he exercised his personal ministry, his teaching we may know and its place in the history of a great revelation. His voice at first spoke to a small company; now it reaches to the heart of the universal church and echoes round the world. Because the man listened so attentively to the highest teaching of the past and was true to the present message God has vindicated the voice and given to it increasing power. Many nameless men, careless of fame and longing only for usefulness, have poured their life-blood into this great literature; surely they have their reward!

This tone of comfort is a new note in Hebrew prophecy; it is made necessary by changed conditions, and it meets a pressing need; the boldness once manifested in condemnation is now shown in consolation.

"Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her

That her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity
is pardoned:
For she hath received of Jehovah's hand double
for all her sins."

This is not too strong for the work that has to be done; the position of the nation seems quite hopeless. If the dry bones are to live, if the dead nation is to arise and enter on a new career, there must be a breath of the Eternal Spirit. The brute force of the Chaldean power has crushed Jerusalem and left it in ruins. The people are scattered as sheep having no shepherd. In a time when misfortune was regarded as a curse they stand in disgrace before God and the world. Then their patriotism and their piety seemed to have received a fatal wound. These are the forces that make a nation great; had they been quite withered the national life would have been completely crushed, a loss to the world and a dishonour to the name of Jehovah. The land might be poor, but they loved it, it was the land of their fathers and the gift of their God. Their religion had been so closely associated with Jerusalem and the temple that it was hard to keep it strong and inspiring in a distant place and an alien atmosphere. How could they sing the song of Zion in a strange land? As they beheld the mighty power of Babylon, its material splendour, military strength and magnificent idolatry, their hearts sank within them for fear; many fell into scepticism or gave way to despair.

"Why sayest thou, O Jacob,
And speakest, O Israel;

My way is hid from Jehovah,
My judgment is passed over from my God?"

Many, no doubt, felt that they could fill their mouths with arguments and answer that "Why"; there seemed to be so many reasons for sadness and so few strong, inspiring voices. How can the preacher meet such a desperate case and justify his call to be a messenger of consolation? He meets it as every great need must be met: by a great theology, the convincing presentation of the highest truths concerning God. It is no cunning of poetic art or skill in oratory that can meet the case, though these high gifts can be consecrated by faith and wielded by love. Persuasive arguments, tender songs, precious promises, noble appeals abound in this portion of scripture, but they all grow out of a great scheme of thought. The preacher is theologian as well as poet, careful in his study of the past as well as quick to receive the present revelation. A sublime conception of God is the centre of his prophecy; his fearlessness in the face of great world forces, his quiet scorn of idolatry, his confident appeal to the past, his mighty faith for the future, all grow out of a theology that throbs with new life.

"Lift up your eyes on high, and behold
Who hath created these things,
That bringeth out their host by number:
He calleth them all by name; by the greatness of
His might,
For that He is strong in power, not one faileth."

Here everything is lifted up into the light of

heaven and touched with the largeness of the skies; local limitations are beginning to drop away; there is a spirituality of tone and universality of range; men struggling with commonplace sorrow and consuming care find it hard to follow the prophecy in its lofty flights. The prophecy helps to re-create Judaism, but it requires something larger for its real fulfilment.

The movement throughout is from God to man; the emphasis is not so much on man's duty as on God's sovereign grace; the predominant note is promise rather than exhortation, promise based on what God is, and what He determines to do. Here the essential divinity and true spirituality of Jehovah reach the highest expression that was possible within the limitations of a national religion. He is the Unique, the Incomparable; He creates the earth, stretches out the heavens, makes both darkness and light, gives life to man and all the dwellers on the earth, controls the course of history, decides the fate of nations, gives victories to kings, chooses, chastises and restores His own people. All this He does as a living God. It is not the story of facts in the distant past but the recognition of a present process; religion to the prophets is not mere history but actual life. Wonders are not confined to the Exodus of long ago, they shall be repeated; Jehovah will give "waters in the wilderness and rivers in the desert," so that the ransomed of Jehovah may return and come to Zion. The nation may have been severely chastised, sent to a hard school, but the restitution to favour, the justification in the arena of history and the face of the world, proceeds not

from its merits or any virtues of its penance, but from the power and purpose of the Eternal God.

Hence the thought of election plays a great part; now that the outlook is world-wide, it expresses the special relation of Israel to Jehovah. This is the charter of salvation.

"But thou, Israel, art My servant,
Jacob whom I have chosen,
The seed of Abraham, My friend.
Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth
And called thee from the corners thereof,
And said unto thee, Thou art My servant,
I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away."

This is the real refuge for the soul in hours of distress; this is the strength of the nation in times of defeat; God's choice is the manifestation of His own wise purpose and shall not utterly fail. When there is no help or hope in man lift your eyes to the throne of the Eternal. This thought of election can be held in a crude fashion; it can, when reduced to a narrow dogma, be made to exclude the very things that God includes in it. Election does not deny evolution; rightly understood, these may be complementary thoughts representing two sides of the same fact. Election does not mean low favoritism on which any class or clique can legitimately rest its spiritual pride. Precisely in this section where God's election of His people is most nobly vindicated in the face of the most distressing contradictions, the missionary idea comes to its fullest expression. That Jehovah is the God of the whole

world means mercy for mankind and not a monopoly for the Jew. That the Jews shall be restored because God has something for them to do for the great world and not merely something for them to enjoy within themselves, is the central feature of this prophecy. Hence the word "comfort" here has no selfish meaning or effeminate associations: it has the idea of strengthening which was in the word before we spoiled it. The prophecy of comfort is a nobler presentation of God, a deeper reading of history, a larger outlook upon life, a call to conquer difficulties and draw sweetness out of sorrow, a declaration that the small people who possess a great truth are mightier than the colossal empire, an assurance that the word of God liveth and abideth for ever.

THE PROPHET A PREACHER TO HIS AGE

"What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Ministers through whom ye believed; and each as the Lord gave to him. I planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase." "Wherefore let no one glory in men. For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's."—1 Cor. iii., 5-6, 21-23.

CHAPTER XIX

THE PROPHET A PREACHER TO HIS AGE

(Isaiah xl)

The immense difference in tone between this and the earlier portions of prophetic literature leads naturally to a consideration of an important question, the adaptation of each prophecy to the time when it was delivered. A generation ago men emphasized, perhaps unduly, the prophet's relation to the future; now it is the fashion to insist upon the need of taking as our starting point his actual contact with the circumstances of his day, and his distinctive message to his own age. It may be worth while, then, to try to make a little clearer to our own thought what is meant by the statement that the prophet was primarily a preacher and that his immediate aim was to bring to his contemporaries a clearer vision of God, and a stronger sense of responsibility to the righteous King who has called the nation. Stated even in this bald fashion we can see at once that "preaching to the times" in a low, vulgar sense is excluded; the prophets were not "popular preachers" in a base sense. They may at times have used means of attracting attention which seem strange to our modern tastes, but they did not deliberately cater to a sensation-loving pub-

lic; they were not content to dress in plausible form the average opinion of the day; they did not perform curious tricks to catch popular applause. There were such prophets in Israel, as elsewhere, but they are gone and their miserable little sermons have perished with them. When we use the word "prophet" now we refer to those choice spirits who dared and suffered all for truth and righteousness; in what sense then were they "preachers to the times"?

It cannot be denied that they uttered predictions more or less definite in their nature, but it may be shown that these were also a part of the preaching. The clear statements of judgment given by Amos and Jeremiah did not refer to some remote event out of all relation to the present, but to an actual chastisement near at hand, the whirlwind to be reaped by those who were so diligently sowing the wind. It is to be noted that, as in the case of Micah's prediction concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, the prediction was sometimes far ahead of its accomplishment (Micah iii. 12; Jer. xxvi. 18). Neither is it meant to question the fact that from these men we receive prophecies in the larger sense. In this sense, that their preaching contained a God-given revelation of truth, truth in many cases seen and applied for the first time, truth so vital that when we pierce behind the drapery and find its real meaning we gain an eternal principle applicable to all time, truth that in its simplest form possesses the promise of infinite growth; the preaching of such truth may well be called prophetic, in that it both promises and prepares for a larger and clearer

manifestation of God. Truths which we today may confirm by a philosophic survey of history they received by living inspiration and the direct vision of life. Hence it is good for us to have fellowship with them for the purpose of bringing the divine life into the commonplaces of our own creed. Prophecies of what must come to pass in a world ruled by a living and righteous God these men have given us; visions of a nobler nation, a purer church, a true anointed King; except in the case of a few scattered and separate poems these prophecies also had a living relationship to the prophet's activity as a preacher.

What is meant, then, is that prophecy was a real ministry, not an artificial production; the particular prophecy was in the noblest sense a sermon, and God does not inspire the great sermon a century before it is needed or intelligble. There are poems and songs in the Old Testament so short and consisting of such general expressions that it may be difficult to say in just what generation they arose. But in the case of a large section of prophecy there is a historical background, a theological tone, a linguistic character which fixes the author in a particular age; when that age is discovered the real light is thrown on the situation so that we can see how the God-sent messenger met the needs of his own generation. Instead of this discovery limiting the prophecy and making it appear antiquated it frees it for larger service, and reveals its permanent power. The thing that is antiquated is the thing that is utterly unintelligible, that has no known relation to your life, or to any life that you know. The

prophet, therefore, resembles other great poets and teachers in this, that we must enter into the large field of his thought through the narrow gateway of his local circumstances. Because he spoke so appropriately to his own age, we must study that age if we are to understand him; because he spoke so powerfully to his own time he may really minister to us.

Thus, much more is meant than can be compressed into a few sentences, but one more thought must for our present purpose be emphasized; if the prophet did not as a rule preach that which referred *only* to the future, neither did he repeat in a mechanical fashion the message that had been addressed to a previous age. The latter is always a real danger in the case of the preacher, for it is a thing that superficial people demand. The preacher is not a reciter but an interpreter; he may make effective use of sacred texts and forms that are hallowed by sacred associations, but it is his business to reincarnate and vocalize the eternal truth that lies behind all texts and dogmas. The man of to-day must hear the wonderful story in his own tongue.

Take one simple illustration of this variety, elasticity and adaptation of living prophecy. In the days of David Jerusalem became the political capital and to some extent the religious centre of Israel. When the northern tribes broke away, the position of the city relatively to its territory became more important; Jerusalem represented Judea; Zion to the patriot and poet became the city of the great King. What, then, was the position of the great prophets as to the fate of this city in the coming judgment?

Micah, the peasant prophet, as we have seen, predicted that "Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest."* The prophet Isaiah was a citizen of Jerusalem, and exercised his strenuous faithful ministry within its walls. He was in the main a prophet of judgment and on the whole his outlook was gloomy. The nation is to be punished for the folly of rulers and for the faithlessness of the people, Jerusalem is to receive severe chastisement (i. 24-26). But at one period of his life, when "The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold," Isaiah declared that the invader should be discomfited and driven back. When his prediction was in some way fulfilled, the people went wild with joy, and the prophet's influence was for the time being increased. A man of Isaiah's faith and temper could not minister to such shallow, selfish satisfaction, and for him the battle of righteousness continued to be severe. It is easy, however, to see how out of such comfort as he did give, coloured as it was by his contempt for the proud Assyrian and his love for the sacred city, men might construct a doctrine of the inviolability of Jerusalem, and connect it with his teaching. A glorious doctrine many people thought it to be, that Jerusalem cannot under any circumstances be desecrated by the foreign foe because it is a sacred citadel, the dwelling place of Jehovah.†

When in the next century Jerusalem possesses in the person of Jeremiah a great prophet spending

*See Chapter IV. †See Chapter XV, page 186.

his energy through long years within its walls, orthodox Jews will certainly ask him to respect a truth so ancient and of such noble ancestry. He cannot do that; he must respect his own message. This so-called truth was not taught in that crude form by the great Isaiah, and even if in his own day he had taught any such doctrine, he would have been the last man to desire to fetter those who were to follow him. Jeremiah taught the destruction of the city, and if the worshippers of the past had not been confronted by a precedent his career might have been cut short; as it was, he was spared to reiterate the solemn warning.* In his day Jerusalem was doomed, the avenger was at the door, there was no hope of deliverance, the only path of safety must be sought in submission to the God-sent conqueror.

In the following century comes the prophet of consolation to declare that Jerusalem has been sufficiently punished and that the hour of restoration is at hand.

"Go ye forth of Babylon,
Flee ye from the Chaldeans,
With a voice of singing declare ye,
Tell this, utter it *even* to the end of the earth; say ye,
Jehovah hath redeemed His servant Jacob."
(Isaiah xlviii. 20.)

Here are three different messages relating to the sacred city; they are not inconsistent, though different in outward form they possess a living harmony.

*See Chapter XIV, page 169; Chapter XV, page 186.

The prophets were all of them patriots; they loved the city of their fathers and the sanctuary of their God, and they longed for the new Jerusalem wherein dwelleth righteousness.

The same principle applies now to the experience of an individual or the life of a community. There is a time when the word of Isaiah, "Not yet," is available and appropriate. God is long-suffering, He gives many warnings; repentance and consistency may yet avert or modify the threatened doom. Coming along the same course we meet the word of Jeremiah, "Too late"; not too late to repent and pray, but too late to turn away the physical consequences; the Chaldean is at the gate, the hour of chastisement has come, there is only one way out of the distress, namely, to submit and acknowledge that the Lord is just. Then there may come, when sorrow has done its work, the great word, "Comfort ye, my people, saith your God."

"For a small moment have I forsaken thee;
But with great mercies will I gather thee."
(liv. 7.)

"Behold I have refined thee, but not with silver;
I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction."
(xlviii. 10.)

The only thing that has changed is the life of man; truth and righteousness remain the same, the redemptive purpose is the same; but prophecy which brings the eternal forces to bear on man's changing circumstances and needs, shows a living flexibility and power of adaptation, so that the

prophet by going below the surface currents of his own age and ministering to its deepest needs has left a word which is "not for an age but for all time."

THE PROPHET'S NATIONAL IDEAL

"*The Servant of the Lord.* There are two questions which the reader of Isaiah should keep well apart. The first is, In whom have the prophet's ideas of the Servant, his sinlessness, vicarious suffering and spiritual power, been verified in fact and history? And the answer of all interpreters is, In Jesus the Messiah. The answer was given by the contemporaries of Christ, and it was given by His own consciousness. The other question is, What subject had this prophet in his own mind when he spoke of the Servant? Very various answers have been given to this question. What is of moment is the prophet's ideas, which enriched and deepened the religious thought of mankind before the Lord came, and were seen to be verified in Him when He came."—The late Rev. A. B. Davidson, LL. D., "The Temple Isaiah," xxvii.

CHAPTER XX

THE PROPHET'S NATIONAL IDEAL

THE SERVANT OF JEHOVAH

(Isaiah xli. 8-11.)

There is one point accepted by all students of this section of the prophetic literature, namely this, that Israel the nation is clearly set forth as "the Servant of Jehovah." The differences that have excited so much discussion concern the literary character of the various passages, their relation to each other, the conception that shall do justice to all of them and bind them into a living unity, and their final fulfilment. Our present concern is with the one point upon which all interpreters, ancient or modern, Jewish or Christian, are agreed. This idea in its present setting is one of the noblest that God has ever given to the human mind; it is still an ideal which Christian statesmen ought to cherish in spite of the popular notion that generous sentiments are, if suitable for any sphere of politics, specially out of place in the international realm.

In the ministry of the prophets the message is mainly to the nation. It is in the dark days when the nation is breaking to pieces that the problems of individual life and personal experience gain greater prominence. Noble individual life is, of

course, manifested in the earlier stage; unless the prophet had been a man of rich spiritual experience he could not have done his great work, and he must have felt that the nation could respond to the divine call only in so far as the individual members, and especially the rulers, were moved by a nobler spirit. But in the later days the questions that concern the life of the individual soul begin to demand more careful consideration. The great leaders of the Hebrew people had from the first the idea of a special relationship between Jehovah and the nation. He brought them out of Egypt and gave them their land, hence they were called to be His servants. This idea was held in a limited simple form by the noblest men. The popular tendency and the influence of the new land worked largely in the direction of degradation. The growth of Israel's religion cannot be called "naturalistic" in any bad sense; it was a high religious discipline and a great spiritual struggle. The work of the inspired teachers was to keep alive the lofty thought of God; this, as we have seen, was only possible through a process that involved the enlargement of that idea. Through the fuller realization of what is meant by the righteousness of God and the service due to Him there comes a grander conception of the nation's calling and destiny. We take, then, the thought of Israel as the servant of Jehovah at the stage when it receives its richest meaning and widest range. That a nation can be a servant of God, a minister of the highest, may be held in a crude way, and may even tend to narrowness rather than breadth; but that is on account of

our infirmity which drags down the sublimest promise to our own low level. In itself it is a creative principle carrying the promise of true catholicity.

This strong statement of the call of the nation to higher service is given as part of a message of comfort to a people cut off from their land and in danger of losing all hope; it is once more the venture of faith. The most daring word is uttered in the darkest hour. It is grounded on the most glorious teaching concerning the character of God, and infuses a nobler meaning into the thought of election. It brings the completion of all the past and hope of all the future. The teaching contained in this view needs now to be appreciated and assimilated in order that we may find a higher fulfillment. If Jesus Christ has fulfilled the idea on its individual side, interpreting, completing, and incorporating in his own life all that was most sacred and divine in the life of the nation, this does not mean that the national side of religious life is to disappear, but rather that it is to be enriched by all the conflicts that have deepened and enlarged the personal life.

All this is true, commonplace and important. Let us now confine ourselves for a little while to a still narrower sphere and ask, did not these words receive a real fulfilment in the career of the Jew even in its broken, disappointing forms? The modern Jew came out of Babylon. The strange ordeal of the Babylonian exile did not create the Jew but it left a deep mark upon him. The Jew still carries with him influences from the earliest days; at no stage was the break with the past absolute. Some of these influences may be difficult to detect, but the

effects of the great captivity are easily found; they are clearly manifest in Jewish social life and religious customs, and we may find them in our own homes and churches. When all proper qualifications have been made concerning previous preparation and later development the statement is substantially correct that the modern Jew came from Babylon. Speaking of the Jew we venture to assert that the prophet's faith was justified, and that through the God-given discipline he did become in a real sense the servant of Jehovah. This does not mean simply that the Jew made sacrifices for his religion, restored his temple, built a hedge around the law and continued to call on the name of Jehovah. No! the phrase "servant of Jehovah" must be tested in the highest light. It must be taken to mean that which Jesus Christ meant by it, and that which the noblest men of to-day are seeking to realize; it must be referred to a service of God which is also the service of humanity. In this sense the Jewish nation has not been an utter failure, though it lost the highest vocation through blind unbelief.

THE JEW OF COMMERCE.

The Jew considered as a trader does not seem a promising subject to which to apply the sacred title "Servant of Jehovah"; but that is owing to the smallness of our faith, and to our arbitrary division of the sacred from the secular. There is no more pressing need in the modern world than the conquest of commerce for Christ, but it cannot be accomplished unless we believe that through trade men may serve God. It is a pity if it is simply

greed of gain that breaks down the aristocratic prejudice against soiling one's hands with trade. Commerce must be recognized as a mighty force for binding men together, a powerful influence for mutual helpfulness. The Jew was not always a mere trader; in the oldest days he was a wanderer and a warrior; then he became a cultivator of the soil, having as his ideal of peace and prosperity to sit under his own vine and fig-tree, no one daring to make him afraid. It is true that the Jew, as typified in Jacob, possessed in large measure the capacity to trade and the tendency to cheat; it cannot, however, be claimed by friend or foe that he has had a monoply of these capabilities. When the Jew against his own will was cut off from his own land and driven out into a cold, cruel world he was compelled to take to trade with new energy and on a different scale. Since then he has never left that field of operations. The Christian charity that has been exercised towards him has consisted in driving him from the soil and scorning him for trading, denouncing his greed and stealing his gains. If the lion of Judah has been transformed into the fox of the Ghetto, "Christian" nations are not free from blame. A sympathetic reading of his history, even in this sphere, will show that in the midst of all that is sordid and mean the tragic and heroic are not lacking. We now see that there are many ways of serving society, and ministering to the general life of the world; even in carrying on the hard struggle for their own existence honest, diligent men build up the common fabric. Unless a man is blinded by senseless anti-Semitic fury he

must confess that the providence which scattered the Jews and turned these narrow patriots into cosmopolitan traders was working in the interest of a higher and more complex civilization.

THE LITERARY JEW.

There were books and scribes long before the captivity in Babylon, but these literary forces play a much larger part in the life and religion of the people after that momentous event. The Jew comes from that great city with a book in his hand, a book that has exercised a tremendous influence over the higher life of the world. The making of literature had long been in process, but the formation of a "canon" or collection of sacred books begins or at least receives a new impetus. The religion that centres round the book may tend to become stiffer, more conventional; but it is purer, more intellectual, better fitted to go out and meet with other forces in the larger arena of international conflict. The meeting of Hebrew and Greek thought is of immense significance for the intellectual and religious life of mankind, but first the Jew must gather and preserve the great treasures from the past, reflect upon them, develop them and apply them to his own life. The nobler class of Jews when cut off from fatherland and temple were thrown back upon the past. They came then to a clear consciousness of the great value of that heritage bequeathed by historians and legislators, poets and prophets. There was begotten in the minds of some the strong conviction that here was something superior to the material splendour of the

world's greatest cities, something that would sustain them in the darkest hour; a sacred literature from whose inspiration the fires of patriotism and piety might constantly be rekindled. The business of the scribe may in the end have become a dreary, mechanical thing, but it had its living period and it served a high purpose. The Christian church did not create the Old Testament and did not collect its various documents. The Jew toiled to bring together these fragments of sacred literature and fought desperately to preserve them from destruction; in that he did a larger work than he dreamed of, and was a servant of God and man.

THE MISSIONARY JEW.

The Jew was not directly a missionary, but with a measure of truth it may be said that he was a missionary in spite of himself. He not only, under God's providence, prepared a book which was to become a common and valued possession of many races; in the foreign land he was led to adopt a simple form of worship, praise, prayer and study of Scripture which has proved helpful to later generations. The scattered communities of Jews might be despised by Greeks and Romans among whom they dwelt, but did not doubt their own superiority. They exulted in the thought that they alone possessed "the oracles of God", and in the very hour when they claimed the monopoly of this great treasure they were unconsciously preparing the way for a new missionary movement. The nation must be judged by what it has done in the long range of its

history; and not simply by its failure in the supreme hour, nor by the spirit manifested in the most bigoted of its members. The Jews of the pre-Christian era served the interests of humanity and from this people sprung the first apostles and missionaries of the new faith. The prophet's faith then, was abundantly justified when he regarded the proud Oriental empire as doomed to disappear while his own people possessed an abiding life. A calm survey of the facts, without any special pleading, leads us to confess that God chose this people for peculiar service, and did not altogether cast them away.

THE PROPHETIC MISSIONARY IDEA

"We are here at the religious summit of the Old Testament. Israel's consciousness of its missionary vocation has indeed shown its influence, in many ways, in later books; but never again with such lofty thought or deep feeling. Before us stands the picture of a heathen missionary, sketched in evangelical colours. It is self-evident that he does not lack the Old Testament background. Duhm observes, on this point, that the songs of the Servant of Jehovah are essentially limited to the formal side of religion, without teaching things new and higher; it would be unfair if on account of such expectation we were to lower the significance of these songs. We must remember that here for the first time a member of the Jewish community is thought of as a missionary who goes out to the despised, 'stupid' heathen—the conversion is not Jehovah's immediate work. Farther that the goal of this mission is the highest possible, to give the heathen a share in the divine mercy, this, not Jehovah's glory, and not the glory of the Jewish community, is the goal. Finally, that he may bring to them Jehovah's institutions and commands; but with this he brings the very soul and body of religion. The least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he, but yet in his time many people and kings were to be astonished at what they saw and heard."—M. Löhr.

CHAPTER XXI

THE PROPHETIC MISSIONARY IDEA

(Isaiah ii. 1-4, xlii. 1-4, lvii. 7-8)

The nineteenth century has been called, in a special and appropriate sense, the missionary era of the Christian Church. There was quick advance of science, rapid change of political and social situation, clash of apparently hostile interests, and keen discussion of opposite theories; but through it all there was the growth of kindly human feeling and direct missionary effort. In many ways the last generation was taught the lesson that we are "members one of another." There is much work of this kind still to be done in every sphere of life, for the upward movement is very slow; but we can rejoice in any sign that men are beginning to recognize more clearly the great scriptural truths and moral principles, which check national pride and soften fierce race prejudice. Our present subject leads us to emphasize the particular expression of the "enthusiasm of humanity" which is found in the missionary enterprise and effort of the Christian Church; we are not called, just now, to a discussion of means and methods, but to study the living spirit, which seeks in this way to manifest itself. In regarding this as one of the highest gifts of God, we

do not thereby undervalue true patriotism, but only a narrow national bigotry.

When we ask why the Christian Church is bound to go outside her own borders and carry the message of mercy into the great world, many answers are possible. The one nearest at hand is that in this she is embodying the spirit and obeying the command of her Lord. To those who acknowledge the authority of Jesus Christ, in the spirit of love and loyalty, this is full and sufficient reason. Others would add that this duty rests upon a moral principle that is now commonly accepted, namely, that if we possess the highest truth it is our duty to spread it; if we enjoy a nobler revelation of God we cannot consistently monopolize it, but rather we must be willing to share it with those whose life has not such abundance of light and blessing. Our study of the Old Testament suggests another way of treating this great subject which may tend to make our knowledge clearer and our faith stronger.

THE GROWTH OF A GREAT IDEA.

When our Lord said, "Go ye into all the world and make disciples of all nations," he gave new emphasis and richer meaning to a truth which had been partially revealed, and brought into the world of reality the highest aspiration of the older religion. His word was not an absolutely new beginning; the suggestive phrase, "fulness of times," has an application here, as elsewhere; the missionary thought had advanced to a certain stage, had received a beautiful if imperfect expression, and was waiting for its complete emancipation; the real work of "the

law and the prophets" was not to be destroyed, but fulfilled. The originality of Jesus is not a display of superficial novelties, but that living interpretation of the past which creates rich promise for the future. Great ideas rule the world, but these divine inspirations do not reach maturity in a few years; they grow to strength, consistency, clearness and beauty through the toil of men, who in each succeeding generation are serving God with their face toward the light. The Old Testament is the seed-plot of great religious ideas, of ideals which show their lofty origin by their power to grow, and their affinity with the highest, holiest life of man. A little careful examination will show that what we call "the missionary idea" has its roots in the sacred literature which reflects the highest life of the Hebrew people.

Judaism is generally classed as a non-missionary religion, and the striking contrast is emphasized that out of the most intensely national religion there sprung a religion that abolishes all distinctions of "Jew and Gentile, Greek and barbarian, bond and free." But our best classifications are apt to be superficial, and our abrupt contrasts often ignore the living thread which lies behind. We must remember that Judaism thus defined is only one side of Hebrew religion, fixed in a hard traditional form. The first Christian missionaries, men of Jewish race, claimed to have received a nobler interpretation of their own past; they were not revolutionists, but, like all real leaders of progress, both conservatives and reformers. Judaism had also done in its own way

real, though limited, missionary work.* The appeal to the prophets in justification of the new movement might often be popular rather than scientific in its form, but it was true to the spirit of prophecy. There is nothing strange in this; a truth is not less divine because it has been given "in sundry times and divers manners"; or, in other words, because its path has been like that of the sun shining more and more unto the perfect day.

To trace the growth of this great idea with anything like completeness would be to give a sketch of the progress of the Hebrew faith, in its many stages, under the influence of the inspiring Spirit. As this is not possible in a brief space, we must be content to emphasize the highest forms that it assumes in the teaching of the prophets, and show how both in its strength and limitation this is a looking forward for nobler things to come. In its earliest days the Hebrew religion was inspired by a lofty thought of God; Moses, the great leader, could not have done his work without the consciousness that God had called him to a noble mission, and his people to a great destiny. But after his day both the people and the religion had a long fight for existence. There was continual conflict without and within; the higher religious movement had always a fierce struggle against popular superstitions. In those days the highest life was clothed in simpler forms. David, who cherished a noble faith in the God of his fathers, felt that to be cut off for a time from the Israelite community was to be driven from the pres-

*See Chapter XX.

ence of Jehovah his God. (I. Sam. xxvi. 19. And down to the end there remained something of local limitation even in the faith of men who had attained to lofty thoughts of God and large conceptions of religion. But in the broad morality of Amos, the spiritual intuition of Hosea, the noble theology of Isaiah, the impartial zeal of Micah, there is the promise of all that was presented in varied forms by later prophets and teachers. We meet, however, the thought of the election of righteousness before that of the call to world-wide service. The great prophets of the Assyrian period found all their energies taxed in declaring to their own people the righteousness of their God, and contending against impure religion. The first thought with regard to the outside world is that God will be glorified among the nations by His judgments, the judgments that manifest His righteousness. Jeremiah gives a hint of mercy following judgment when foreigners who have learned the ways of God's people shall be gathered in and share the inheritance (Jer. xii. 16). Remarkable also is his utterance, "O Jehovah, my strength, and my stronghold, and my refuge in the day of affliction, unto thee shall the nations come from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Our fathers have inherited nought but lies, vanity and things wherein there is no profit." (xvi. 19.)

After the days of this great teacher the thought of Israel's world-wide mission and religious service is manifested in a rich variety of forms; it finds manifold expression in prophecy and psalms. The most frequent statement is that foreign nations and distant people shall come to Jerusalem to seek truth

and worship God; of this side of the idea the following twice-repeated passage may serve as a noble type:

"For it shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of Jehovah's house shall be established at the head of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it. And many peoples shall go and say:

'Come and let us go to the mountain of Jehovah,
To the house of the God of Jacob,
That He may teach us His ways,
And we will walk in His paths;
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
And the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem,
And he shall judge between the nations,
And give decision to many peoples;
And they will beat their swords into ploughshares
And their spears into pruning hooks;
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
Neither shall they learn war any more.'"

(Isaiah ii. 2-4; Micah iv. 2-4.)

In this lofty ideal it is not suggested that the true religion will leave its home in Jerusalem and go out to seek and save that which is lost; it is an ideal Jerusalem, possessing an attractive religion, that is pictured but linked to the local habitation that was so dear to every pious, patriotic Jew. Peace there shall be in the future days, when Jehovah's sovereignty is recognized and religion reigns with gentle guidance and sweet constraint, that is a feature always present in these sublime pictures of the great future. In those days of wars and tumults men longed for peace as the greatest gift of God. The

distinctive thing here is the attractiveness and effectiveness of pure religion, and the mighty faith that, in days to come, it shall attain to fuller manifestation. Here is an abiding truth which, freed from local limits, must be taken up into the life of the Christian Church. The Church must be a centre of attraction, a source of inspiration, a seat of instruction. Men must be drawn not by sensational shows, but by the presence of higher truth and purer life. This was fulfilled to a certain small extent even in later Judaism; many earnest men and noble women from many nations, even the highest and proudest, did frankly and fearlessly recognize the superiority of its religious message.* It is true that there was a strong tendency to dwell upon the external splendour of Jerusalem, and to picture the Gentiles as paying a slavish homage to the Jews; but in the real prophetic pictures the prominence is given to the glory of the righteous God and the winning power of the highest spiritual truth.

Behold my servant, whom I uphold;
My chosen, in whom my soul delighteth:
I have put my spirit upon him;
He shall bring forth judgment to the nations.
He shall not cry, nor lift up,
Nor cause his voice to be heard in the street.
A bruised reed shall he not break,
And the dimly burning wick he shall not quench:
He shall bring forth judgment in truth.
He shall not burn dimly, nor be bruised
Till he have set judgment in the earth;
And the isles shall wait for his law.

(Isaiah xlii. 1-4.)

*See Chapter XXII, page 265.

Here the missionary hope reaches its highest expression in the picture of a servant of Jehovah, who, with gentle persistence and unostentatious zeal, shall carry to the nations the precious gifts of revelation which have been coming to clearness and power through all the toil and travail of the past. It would be well for the teacher of to-day to linger lovingly over this picture of a divinely elected and supremely gifted minister. From it he may learn to combine reverence for past revelations with quickness to hear the present voice of God, stern faithfulness to God and truth, with keen knowledge of life and kindly sympathy for men. But the fact that concerns us now is that whether this is a personification of Israel or the picture of the individual ideal Servant, we have the true religion beating against the narrow local barriers and leaping forward to a large universal life. Judaism could never completely fulfil such a picture; it can only be realized by the pure spiritual religion of Jesus. In its earliest days Christianity went forth to free religion and man from narrow prejudices and petty limitations; great things have been done along this line, but an immense task still lies before the Church, demanding both intelligence and love.

Thus we see that the "missionary idea" which is now an accepted part of the evangelical programme rests not alone upon the law of common obligation, nor even altogether upon the gracious word of Jesus. It has a great history; it has been woven like a golden thread into the very fibre of the world's highest thought and noblest life; God, who took care of it in darker days, and who in the fulness of

time gave it the richest manifestation in the life of His Son, will guide it to victory, and even out of imperfect effort will bring a fuller embodiment of His own Kingdom, so that the true Servant shall "see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied."

THE PROPHETIC IDEA OF SUFFERING: THE GREAT PASSION PSALM

"To us it is still wonderful that an Old Testament saint, poet, seer sketches a picture which is realized centuries after, even if it remains in many and not unessential features behind this realization. In this is shown the inner relationship of the Old Testament religion with Christianity, certainly also its inferiority, in so far as it could think but not realize the highest thoughts."—B. Duhm.

"Prophecy is like the rosy dawn, which ushers in the day. The prophetic word is 'a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn and the day-star arise in your hearts.' (2 Peter, 1:19.) Prophecy is as trustworthy as the dawn certainly kisses the hem of the sun's robe. Moreover, were there no dawn there would be no day, and the soft glow of the morning red prepares the eye for the brighter light, and cheers the heart that yearns for the day. But the rosy line of morning is not the blazing day-star itself. Aurora falls when the monarch sun assumes his radiant sway."—E. Koenig, D. D., "The Exile's Book of Consolation," translated by the Rev. J. A. Selbie, M. A.

CHAPTER XXII

THE PROPHETIC IDEA OF SUFFERING
THE GREAT PASSION PSALM

(ISAIAH LII. 13—LIII. 12.)

In the Acts of the Apostles, we read, that the Evangelist Philip met a foreigner who had been "to Jerusalem for to worship," who also "was returning and sitting in his chariot and was reading the prophet Isaiah." This man was unconsciously fulfilling a part of the great prophetic message, namely this, that Israel's religion should go outside its own narrow circle and become a blessing to many needy souls. But note more particularly "the place of the Scripture which he was reading":

"He was led as a sheep to the slaughter;
And as a lamb before his shearer is dumb,
So he openeth not his mouth:
In his humiliation his judgment was taken away:
His generation who shall declare?
For his life is taken away from the earth."

This man evidently had an instinct for high themes and central positions, or he was caught at a happy moment. Mark his genuine modesty, when he is politely asked the pertinent question, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" he replies, "How can I, except some one shall guide me?" But his in-

telligence is equal to his humility; in one clear, searching question he fastens upon the main point of interest, and of difficulty, "Of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself or of some other man?" For the Evangelist this was a favorable position from which to preach Jesus with fervour and enthusiasm to this thoughtful man. Christian expositors agree with Philip that in our Lord Jesus the prophecy finds its real meaning, and highest glory. We agree also with the questioner that the passage is a difficult one, when we seek to discover what was really in the mind of the writer. A glance at the Revised Version will reveal to the ordinary reader the fact that the work of translation and explanation in this case is not easy. As to the application of the passage the Ethiopian shows the impression that is made upon the mind of the average reader, namely, that the prophet is thinking of an individual, himself, or some other person. That is not only the popular and traditional view, it is also held by several modern scholars who have made the subject a matter of special study. Even the suggestion of this reader that the prophet speaks of himself is not to be rudely thrust aside. There is deep truth in it: if the prophet did not speak of himself he spoke out of himself, for God does not send to us such a message except through a man who in his own life has, in some measure, learned the sacred meaning of sorrow; and the picture of the suffering Servant is also the picture of one who shall possess more fully, and express more clearly the prophetic spirit. Prophet and prophecy have, by God's grace, a deep spiritual relationship.

When we pass from the position of the Evangelist to that of the Old Testament student we find ourselves face to face with a problem which because of its interest and difficulty has attracted the attention and stimulated the toil of the foremost scholars and keenest critics. Who is the author of this passage? Is it correct to call this and the related passages "poems" or "lyrics"? (xlii. 1-4, xlix. 1-6, l. 4-9). Can these passages be shown to have a real connection with their present context? If not, does this suggest a difference of author, or at least of time and mood of the same author, or is it sufficient to say there is quick "dramatic" change of standpoint? Is it likely that the passage now before us is composed of two poems, or of "a theodicy psalm worked over in the Messianic sense, under the influence of the sacrificial idea?" In what sense is the passage "Messianic"? These and other questions are still much debated, there is no immediate prospect of substantial unanimity, and indeed the lines cross each other in a curious fashion. Now, these questions are important: the process of investigation, undertaken in a reverent, thoughtful spirit, is of great service. We may, in our efforts to explain apparent want of coherence, be tempted to lay too much weight on the fact that the prophet was a poet and not a mere logician or systematic theologian; there is logic of its kind in a great poem, it is possible to have consistency of thought without formal system, and the really great thinker, be he poet or philosopher, does work in harmony with his own central truth. Thus we honour the prophet in seeking to understand his place

in history, the particular message confided to his care, and the relation of this to the larger realm in which he has played his part. Therefore the attempt to analyze a piece of sacred literature into its original elements may be both reasonable and reverent.

It is, however, also possible to place these questions in the background while we give prominence to some one aspect of truth. The thought we emphasize now is the treatment of suffering in this great passage. In the limited view with which we at present regard it this idea remains in substance the same —for example, whether the prophet meant that through Israel's suffering supreme blessing would come to mankind, or was prompted to picture an ideal individual sufferer bearing the sins and sorrows of his fellowmen, we have here in either case an idea of suffering that is new, lofty and fruitful. Let us fix our attention for a brief space on that one thought. It may be said that this is not the whole story or the main element in it, that the wonderful, incredible thing is that one who went down to such deep humiliation was lifted by his God to such sublime heights of exaltation. If we allow that, we may still maintain that the expositor has a perfect right to select one striking feature of the picture for separate meditation providing that he acts fairly by it, and is true to the spirit of the whole. Without discussing the setting of the passage, and all the particular problems that arise out of it, we can dwell upon the fact that the idea of vicarious suffering receives here a clearness and nobleness of expression that is not found in any other part of the Old Testament.

From this point of view we can see how superficial is the statement that "Prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament and Adversity the blessing of the New." When the hope of a future life did not play a great part it was natural that the justification of God's people should be looked for in the actual events of life, and of the nation in the arena of history; but those who represent the highest spirit of the Old Testament are precisely those who fought against the common creed that present success is the real test of God's favour. And as to the spiritual life itself, though it differed so much in form, it was in essence the same, to this extent, at least, that then as now, the richest experience came through painful struggle, and the deepest revelations were given to those who bore the cross. We have a striking example of this in the seventy-third psalm, a wonderful story of strain and temptation, in which the thoughtful, saintly writer tells how by the pressure of misfortune he was led to the verge of scepticism, and almost lost faith in the meaning of life, and the moral order of the world. He pictures for us his dismay when he realized how the proclamation of his despair would bring distress to the hearts of those who were really seeking to live as sons of God, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. He tells how he was led to reconsider the question in the light of the sanctuary, to confess his stupidity and to find in God the supreme and satisfying blessing. In the book of Job the problem of suffering is handled in a still bolder fashion, with larger and more varied treatment. It is possible to draw out and tabulate several "so-

lutions" from that wonderful book; these are worthy of careful consideration, but a serious study of the daring speeches that the poet has placed in the mouth of Job forces us to the conclusion that his supreme concern was for the freedom of the human spirit, the liberty of the awakened soul to face the real facts of life, and to pour out its complaint before God unfettered by hard conventional dogmas. There is a volcanic energy, a majestic passion in the stormy utterance of the "patient" Job that is very significant. Here, however, we have a distinctly different note:

"He was despised and forsaken of men;
A man of sorrows and acquainted with sickness:
And as one from whom men hide their face
He was despised and we esteemed him not.
Surely he hath borne our sicknesses,
And our sorrows he carried:
Yet we did esteem him stricken,
Smitten of God and afflicted.
But he was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities:
The chastisement of our peace was upon him,
And with his stripes we are healed."

In addition to its prophetic character, in the stricter sense, the teaching contained in these words opposes the narrow, cruel view of suffering with even mightier power than the passionate protest of Job. In this chapter there are two aspects of the silent sufferer's experience; the picture of one marred by loathsome disease, which, being regarded as the mark of heaven's vengeance, causes the af-

flicted one to be cast out from the society of men; and the description of the same sufferer as the victim of bitter persecution and judicial murder. For our present purpose the first scene as represented in these lines is sufficient. It is the new noble thought of suffering, its meaning and purpose with which we are here concerned. In Old Testament times there was a strong tendency to look upon sorrow, especially in sudden, mysterious and terrible forms, as a direct stroke of God, a sign of the fierce anger of the Almighty. That was a very ancient thought, and in a certain crude form it embodied the idea of a moral government of the world. The truth that there is in it we must still preserve, and bring it into harmony with other truths that have been revealed. A simple statement of life such as we find, for example, in the first Psalm sets forth nobly one side of the truth concerning the moral government of the world, but when it is treated as the whole and hardened into a cold complete formula it may be very cruel. It was quite common in those days both for conventional theology and popular superstition to argue back from extreme suffering to enormous sin. We have got rid of that horrible nightmare, we know that some of the noblest saints have been great sufferers; we know that whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth. Many other great things we know, but in our vulgar moments we still worship what the world calls success. But familiar as we are with these words it is difficult for us to realize what a spiritual revolution there was hidden in the prophet's statement; here is a lonely, silent sufferer; in our blindness and unbelief we treat him

as one bowed down under the curse of God, when the truth is that he willingly stoops under the burden of our sin and shame. Suffering may be self-sacrifice, the anguish and torture may be patiently accepted as from the hand of God and out of it may flow streams of healing mercy for those who are blind, wilful and rebellious. It was a great inspiration that led the prophet to look thus into the heart of life's mystery, and out of his deep vision to draw this pathetic picture of "the man of sorrow and acquainted with grief." When we speak of the newness of this teaching we do not mean to say that in the early days men did not realize in their own simple way that "we are members one of another." In very real ways the innocent suffered with or for the guilty; each member of the family or clan shared more fully the fate of the whole than is the case now. But that was on a low natural plane and was carried out in ways that were mechanical and superstitious though often tragic enough. Here we are on a higher plane; we have entered the sacred region of reverent submission of spiritual sympathy, of willing self-sacrifice. That the suffering of an innocent member of the human family can have redemptive force for mankind is a wonderful suggestion. This is not a theory or a theology; it is a prophecy which means that it is not a completed formula, a fully revealed truth, it is prophetic by virtue of its incompleteness as well as by its relative perfection. Judaism did not and could not realize this or there would have been no need for Jesus and Calvary. The Christian religion, in the person of its great Teacher, interprets

the loftiest anticipations of the ancient saints and embodies them in living forms of willing sacrifice and loyal service. When in the light of the Cross men learn the real meaning and power of suffering the bitterness and curse passes away and those who know the redeeming power of love can count it an honour to suffer in the cause of God and humanity.

THE PROPHET AS A CHURCH-BUILDER

"We have a few fragments of the utterances of Haggai preserved for us in the Old Testament Canon. They are so brief and bald and abrupt as to suggest the opinion that they are but notes of his discourses, mere outlines of what he really said. As they are preserved for us they certainly convey no idea of wealth of poetic imagination or richness of oratorical coloring. But Haggai may have possessed none of these qualities, and yet his words may have had a peculiar force of their own. He is a reflective man. The long meditation of years has taught him the value of thoughtfulness. The burden of his message is 'Consider your ways.' In short, incisive utterances he arrests attention and urges consideration. But the outcome of all he has to say is to cheer the drooping spirits of his fellow-citizens, and urge on the rebuilding of the temple with confident promises of its great future. For the most part his inspiration is simple, but it is searching, and we perceive the triumphant hopefulness of the true prophet in the promise that the latter glory of the house of God shall be greater than the former."—Prof. W. F. Adeney, M. A., "Expositor's Bible." Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE PROPHET AS A CHURCH-BUILDER

(Haggai i; Ezra iii. 11-13.)

It is an oft-repeated saying that the nation is happy that has no history; if "happiness" is taken in the superficial sense of mere material comfort, then this saying is quite true. God's gift to a great nation is not a stagnant, unruffled prosperity, but a series of heroic struggles, and for reward a mighty, wide-spreading influence. No one who knows their history would venture to call the Israelites a happy people in the shallow sense of the word. A Jew looking back upon the history of his nation is tempted to regard it simply as a long series of wretched failures and bitter disappointments; and it is certainly true that it is difficult to find in the history of any people more violent contrasts, brighter hopes and darker disappointments. But the prophetic view which expresses the highest attainment of a living faith is that the nation is the Servant of Jehovah, and that these very trials are a discipline for loftiest service.* This is one form of life's final mystery, that the noblest things come through the cross, the sweetest songs are born in sharpest sor-

*See Chapter XX.

row, the highest knowledge comes through hardest toil and bitterest experience.

In the Old Testament records we can see clearly the close connection, in the case of this people, of religion with history; the first Exodus is the birth-hour of the nation and the beginning of religious organization. The people came into Palestine under the influence of a great religious impulse, and although their stock of theology might be small and their ecclesiastical equipment simple, the fact that Jehovah was regarded as creator and guide of the nation's life was a strong protection against a low nature worship, and the source and stimulus of a living, progressive movement. Prophecy interpreted history and history modified prophecy. From this point of view "the Second Exodus," the Return from Babylon, was of immense importance. In the earlier days, two centuries before our present period, prophetic preaching lays emphasis on judgment, it fights against popular superstition, and rebukes the sins of reckless rulers and greedy oppressors. After the great catastrophe of the sixth century B. C. it takes on the tender tone of consolation, it gives magnificent promises and seeks to inspire new endeavours. Before the Exile the prophets are severe critics of the Church, they denounce the ritual that is divorced from real religion, and pour contempt upon a worship which they regard as a delusive form of selfishness. After the Exile the prophets work with the priests, and use their powers of speech to persuade the people that it is a duty and a privilege to build the temple and support the Church (Ezra v. 1-3). This change is highly significant and is worthy of

careful consideration. When the Northern Israelites were deported and scattered about one hundred and thirty years before this Babylonian Exile the result was to destroy entirely the national existence and separate character of those particular tribes, and to bring into Palestine a mongrel population and mixed religion (John iv.). Hence the Jews on their return instead of finding in the immediate neighbourhood of Jerusalem support in their religious struggles had to contend with lasting enmity and bitter rivalry; in that sense the northern people were, as a community, "lost" to the common cause.* The experience of Judah in its hour of doom was different, it was the flower of the small nation that was transported across the desert to the city and district of Babylon. There a community was formed, which sent out its branches in various directions, and those who came back to Palestine returned for the very purpose of fighting for the preservation and purity of their religion. This was a tragic national experience, and while it did not involve extinction, it meant in many things a great break from the past and left a lasting mark on the life and character of the Jewish people. The Hebrew word "to remember" meant originally "to pierce," and certainly this was a memorable experience in the sense that it reached the heart and left a mark that is still very far from being effaced.*

When Judah was conquered and Jerusalem destroyed it seemed as if all was lost, and as a matter of fact many Jews did lose heart and hope. Jere-

*See Chapter III. †See Chapter XX.

miah, who declared with startling boldness and unflinching persistency the inevitableness of the judgment, also possessed the strongest faith that the religious life would survive the destruction of the political organization. From his lofty standpoint the nation died in hope of a glorious resurrection; the resurrection was real, though the glory was delayed. Those who looked eagerly forward to the Return from Babylon were inspired to paint the glories of the new movement in glowing colours, which now shine out in strong contrast to the hard, dull reality. But with this and many other examples still before us we still thank God for poets, idealists and enthusiasts, who make the desert of hard fact to "rejoice and blossom as the rose," and throw a halo of glory around "the day of small things." This small movement is a real link in the golden chain of God's providence and turns out to be a thing of larger, more lasting significance than even the richest poetry had suggested. All the poetry is justified when we take a long view. "The ransomed of Jehovah shall return and come to Zion, with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." This is noble language, fit indeed for a description of heaven; but when the Sons of the Captivity returned to Zion what they found was not heaven, but a very mean, miserable bit of earth, a city in ruins, and its very limited territory surrounded by envious and troublesome neighbours. Certainly they needed tender comfort as well as bracing exhortation from their preachers. It has been said that a

nation was destroyed by the Babylonian conquest and "a sect" came back to Jerusalem. This form of expression, while seeking to stigmatize the narrowness of Judaism, is itself needlessly harsh and narrow. If we are impartial, we can see that at this stage a certain amount of exclusiveness was absolutely necessary; it was only by fierce struggle and stern resistance that men preserved the rich results of all these years of toil and discipline. In later times, when the noblest work had been accomplished, this narrowness often degenerated into intolerant bigotry. But the men who in this great crisis preserved for us the fruit of such real inspiration and varied activity were not altogether lacking in catholicity of spirit.

THE PROPHET AS CHURCH-BUILDER.

When we see that there were strong reasons why the temple, now the one sanctuary, should be rebuilt, that it was indeed a matter of life and death for the Jewish religion, we can understand that it was no degradation of the prophetic office for its ministry to be concerned with the building of a church and the strengthening of its organization. The gathered literature, the final creed, the elaborate organization, these we are told tend to destroy the prophetic spirit. But this is not an absolutely necessary consequence. The highest prophet when he comes can say without loss of originality, "It is written," and can pay due honour to the Church while rebuking its rulers. When we see the important place taken by the second Temple in the history of Judaism, and in the life of the world, we can understand that the prophets

of this period are doing a noble work, even if they do not possess the personal greatness or wield the tremendous influence of some of their predecessors.

What use was there in these pious people struggling across the desert to their old home, with such heroic faith and in the face of such tremendous difficulties? (Ezra vii. 21.) The answer to that question will give the real basis of this ministry of the post-exilic prophets. There were no doubt "advanced men" in Babylon, and one can now have great sympathy with their views. They had learned that their religion could survive after great shocks, and in a strange land; they had caught a glimpse of the great truth that the acceptable sacrifice is the broken heart and contrite spirit, and it was possible for some of them, without losing their faith, to doubt whether it was absolutely necessary to build again the walls of Jerusalem. (Psalm li.) But if we follow the "advanced men" altogether we may find ourselves in the air without a body; or we may forget the needs of the average man in our hasty pursuit of the ideal. The time will come when the religion can be freed from its local habitation, with advantage to itself and in the interest of mankind, but that time had not arrived. There were also wealthy Jews, men who, having followed the wise advice of Jeremiah, had settled and prospered in Babylon; many of these very naturally did not wish to be disturbed; they give their sympathy and a subscription. Subscriptions were in this, as in many other cases, of great service, but the men who have saved great causes have also given their souls. (Zech. vi. 10.)

The men who led the Return, as well as those who came later to support the cause, felt that this business was of infinite importance to themselves; they must put patriotism and piety before all personal considerations (Neh: 1) And indeed it is important that men should be true to the best traditions of their race, and seek to preserve the great heritage given by God to their fathers. Conscience, not convenience, must dictate the form that such service must take. To stifle spiritual enthusiasm and conquer deep conviction would have been in the case of these men to sell their birthright for a mess of pottage; or to end by despising themselves and despairing of all noble effort.

In responding to the call of duty they did a work of great importance to those who were to come after. The second Temple became a centre towards which the Jews scattered throughout the world could turn in reverence and hope, the symbol of racial and religious unity. In distant lands, and among strange people the pious Jew could greet the coming festival with the sweet words, "I was glad when they said unto me, let us go unto the house of Jehovah." Thus the worship was perpetuated, and the highest religion kept its place until the Christ came to complete its revelation and to enlarge its mission. That being so, the work of these men was important for us; we who are so distant from them in time and so different in circumstances owe to them a deep debt of gratitude. We cannot then despise this period and call the immediately succeeding generations "four hundred years of silence." It had its own significance and heroism, its

noble struggles, bright visions, and inspiring voices. The effort to build this temple and maintain this worship involved heavy strain and great sacrifices. Through these men we are linked to the distant past, to Moses and all the prophets; if the circumstances were hard and prosaic, all honour to the men who in the face of great difficulties preached the word of hope.

THE TEMPLE AND LIFE.

(Ezra iii. 11-13.)

Because of such faithfulness we find bright, poetic flashes in a chronicle which is often counted dry and commonplace. It was a festive day when the foundation of the temple was laid, for out of this small beginning great things were expected. It required strong faith to sing in such a time, "for He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever toward Israel." There arose a great shout of joy, but in mid-air it was caught by the sound of wailing, which met and mingled with it; the funeral dirge broke in upon the wedding march. At a distance you could scarcely tell whether it meant the cheers of the victors or the groans of the vanquished. A symbol this of human life with its diverse sounds of anguish or rapture ever rising into the air. To the aged there is an undertone of sadness echoing through the music of every festal day. The old men did not go with deliberate intention of marring the brightness of the occasion with their untimely tears, their reason for weeping was the only valid reason, they could not help it; in the hour of joy sorrowful memories surged over their souls, and

found expression in tears. This is the true consecration when sorrow and joy are poured forth on the foundation of the temple, for in the Church diverse interests and feelings should be harmonized. Two different views of life are natural to youth and age, the life of one is largely in the past, to the other the future is full of promise. To the one "the good old days" are very real, while to the other the golden days are all to come. In the house of God these opposite points of view must be harmonized, the Temple must shelter old and young, its songs must soothe the one and summon the other to battle. God has done great things for our fathers—that truth we must not lose; God still speaks, and promises large things to us—that faith we must also cherish. Religion must link the life of young and old in pure sweet fellowship. Because the Temple is a symbol of the unseen kingdom, a place where "the communion of saints" may be realized through a pure worship of God, there are times when the prophet may appear as a church-builder, calling men to consecrate material gifts to high spiritual purposes. When we contrast this form of activity with the fierce criticism of sanctuary and ritual which marked the ministry of Amos and Isaiah we may learn that the prophet is a man who delights to give emphasis to the particular aspect of truth that, in his own time, is in great danger of being neglected and despised.

THE PROPHET'S PROMISE OF PEACE,
OR,
THE CITY WITHOUT A WALL

"Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the River Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek of him a straight way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. For I was ashamed to ask of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way; because we had spoke unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them that seek him for good; but his power and wrath is against all them that forsake him. So we fasted and besought our God for this; and he was entreated of us."—Ezra viii. 21-23.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PROPHET'S PROMISE OF PEACE
OR,
THE CITY WITHOUT A WALL

(Zech. ii. 1-5.)

Zechariah was also a church-builder; he spent his strength in supporting the leaders of the small Jewish community, and in quickening the hopes of the people, when their circumstances were straitened and their outlook dark. It is a ministry of consolation, a prophecy of blessing and enlargement. We may regard the early chapters of this book as a sermon on such a text as this: "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; that she hath received of Jehovah's hand double for all her sins" (i. 13, 15). After the introduction we have a series of visions which serve as illustrations for the gracious theme. The prophet begins with a suggestive thought which brings light out of darkness, and solace out of distress. The nation has learned from history the lesson it refused to receive from prophecy. "The former prophets" have passed away, it is possible now to look back and see that they were rejected

messengers, and to see also that the course of events has fully vindicated their preaching. What the people would not learn from intelligent, earnest teaching has been burned into their souls by sharp experience. The chastisement was severe, but God was just (i. 6). The nation has not been utterly consumed, though it seemed to come so near to that sad end; the adversary can be reminded that it is "a brand plucked out of the fire" (iii. 2). Now its life must be built up again, the great teaching from the past must be woven into present life to make possible a brighter future. The preacher, the idealist, whom men denounce as a dreamer must infuse new poetry into the dull prosy routine, and cast a halo of glory over "the day of small things."

This he seeks to accomplish by means of a series of visions, which tell in varied forms God's loving zeal for His own people and His vengeance on wicked oppressors, His renewed acceptance of Judah and His choice of Jerusalem, His purpose to cast iniquity out of the land and His promise of peace and protection, His blessing upon the rulers and His gift of grace and attraction to the Jew. The prophet can use clear, striking speech as well as strange symbols. Surely this is a fine description of peaceful prosperity, "There shall yet old men and old women sit in the streets of Jerusalem, every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof." (viii. 4, 5.) And he makes quite clear that he is not thinking of mere material prosperity as he writes the charter of a city that God can bless, "Speak ye every

man the truth with his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: and let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath; for all these are things that I hate, saith Jehovah." (viii. 16, 17.) Why then should he use visions? The only reasonable answer seems to be that these were in his day attractive and effective means for imparting instruction and inspiration. Such word-pictures were, no doubt, attractive and helpful to thoughtful men, as they conveyed the promises in a poetic form, which suggests more than is expressly stated. But the illustration suited to one age and people may to others seem childlike, quaint, or almost grotesque. And it is open to any one to say, why should we puzzle ourselves with the riddles of an ancient preacher, or try to read the meaning of pictures that are out of date? Such a question could, however, only come from a shallow mind, and the discussion that it raises is not confined to the sacred Scriptures. It touches our relation to all the life of the past; how is it that precisely in this busy, scientific age there is so much reverent, sympathetic study given to the great things of the past? Because we realize that all our life is one and God has been guiding us through all the ages. All real study or search for truth is a religious movement; and this literary investigation which tries to get behind the form and fashion of an age to the eternal truth is an act of devotion. The religious man seeks to get out of the small circle of self into the thoughts of God and the life of humanity. One form of this endeavour worthy of being called worship is the sympathetic communion

with an artist, poet, or preacher to whom God gave a great message, even though it requires patient perseverance to clear away the dust of centuries or break from traditional interpretation and stand face to face with the original thought. This demands attention and thoughtfulness, but it brings a richer reward than any small sensational pleasure-seeking.

THE MEANING OF THIS VISION.

There are different kinds of visions, those that come with overpowering force and carry the prophet for the time being out of himself, leaving a lasting impression, and those which are created by the calmer movement of the imagination, and serve to present in parabolic form the prophet's faith and teaching.* Zechariah's visions seem to be rather of the latter kind, they remind us of Bunyan's immortal dream, and indeed the great puritan preacher may have received here the suggestion of "the Interpreter." One must not try to make too deep this distinction between the form in which the truth comes to the prophet and the manner in which he imparts it to us, but if not unduly pressed it may serve a useful purpose. Here we have a prophecy of comfort and each vision presents a particular phase of the consoling message. "Cry yet again, saying, Thus saith Jehovah of hosts: My cities shall yet overflow with prosperity, and Jehovah shall comfort Zion and shall yet choose Jerusalem." (i. 17.) This is the commission, and very much was it needed in those dark days when men wept as they

*See Chapter V.

recalled the ancient glory of Jerusalem, which seemed to have passed away forever. The proud, tyrannical nations must be brought low, and thus the stage cleared for the growth of Jerusalem's prosperity and influence. (1:18-21).

This would appeal most powerfully to the young men such as those who shouted for joy when the foundation of the temple was laid. Hence in the vision we see a young man with a measuring line who wishes to measure Jerusalem, the enlarged and beautiful Jerusalem, to see what is its length and breadth. There are in every community men of mathematical mind who lay great stress on the statistics of a subject. If they hear of a city they wish at once to know its exact size and population. That is good, in its place, it checks mere dreaming and limits unbridled imagination; but there are facts to which figures do scant justice and forces that cannot be imprisoned in a definite formula. When it is a matter of God's presence our small measurements are put to shame. The young man, whether his tendency is towards poetry or mathematics, has generally two qualities: the capability of great faith in the future, and the craving for definite knowledge. The young man does not doubt that Jerusalem will be great but he wishes to know how great, and what will be its precise form. These are qualities to be cultivated and prized; the young man who thinks that all great things are in the past is spiritually dead, fit only for mere mechanical duties. The young man who is slovenly in his statements and inaccurate in his measurements is doomed to failure, and it may even be to disgrace. All good

work demands clearness and accuracy, and the lives of men are involved in exact measurements. But this training in definiteness is meant to fit the young man to find his own way through trackless regions, and to learn that there is a divine presence that surpasses all limitations, a fire that burns away all barriers as it brings largeness and freedom into the life of man. The young man in the vision is told that this is not a case for the measuring line, Jerusalem shall not be enclosed by a wall but spread out like open villages; her glory and strength will be the presence of God within and around her. This means that Jerusalem shall have prosperity difficult to measure combined with peace and protection of the noblest kind.

THE CITY WITHOUT A WALL.

This is a bold thought; Zechariah is not ranked with the greatest of Old Testament prophets, but he shows here the boldness of the inspired man, the man whose thought breaks through local limitations. (Rom. x. 20.) He dares to proclaim a city such as no man had ever seen; in ancient days the city was essentially a citadel and sanctuary. The most important feature of the city was the wall behind which people could find shelter when the enemy swept unchecked over the open country, and by means of which powerful armies were kept at bay. The very life of Jerusalem depended on the wall; the patriotic Nehemiah and his helpers had to combine the use of sword and trowel in order to complete the fortifications. The Jews at this time had many troublesome neighbours, and to ensure a peaceful

place on the earth it must be enclosed and protected by the well-built wall. What then does the prophet mean when he pictures a city that has no wall but is rather like a number of villages or settlements spreading round a common centre? He will certainly be reminded that life is not worth living without the city wall. There are different kinds of walls, he says, and the city will have a wall that is real to faith though unseen by mortal eye. How pleasant life is in the open country, under the vine and fig-tree, if only we can feel secure! That joy God will give to the city when he takes away the wall, for He Himself will be a wall of fire round about. The prophet's vision is, at once, an expression of his own faith in coming blessing, and an assertion that spiritual forces are superior to earthly defences. He knows that men have had to build walls to protect their life and their religion but he realizes that that religion is ever striving to get beyond all human barriers. If God is in Jerusalem men will be drawn to her, and no earthly wall can circumscribe her throbbing life.

Was this prophecy fulfilled? If taken in the sense of lasting prosperity for the actual Jerusalem, no! If taken in the deeper sense proper to prophecy, yes! This does not mean a fanciful allegorizing of the vision but finding the principle at the heart of it, and then enlarging its application. A few generations later Judaism manifested, under the inspiration of faith, its power to make a successful fight, and then enjoyed a brief space of political power and

*See Chapters XX and XXI.

worldly prosperity. But when the end came the wall, though it made a stubborn resistance possible, could not stop the progress of imperial Rome and the city was apparently forsaken by its God. There was no wall of fire to consume the fierce soldiers who executed vengeance upon the doomed city. But every real vision of truth is fulfilled in various ways; the prophet is able to speak of the future because he sees clearly the thing that really is, and is not blinded by bewildering appearances. Hence Zechariah in his vision of the city without a wall has at the same time prophesied concerning the future of God's church, and laid down a principle that admits of many applications.

(1) In the history of the Jews there would have been less shame and disappointment if they had trusted less in the wall and more in God, the latter not in the mechanical sense of expecting prodigies to minister to their pride but by bringing into civic life and national policy the reason and righteousness taught by the prophets.

(2) Jerusalem did spread out her scattered settlement into the great world, the synagogue was planted in the chief cities of the Roman Empire; and just in proportion as the Jews were true to the higher elements of their faith they sent forth truths of priceless value and imperishable influence.

(3) How is it that in this age and in our own land we can allow ancient walls, and local barriers to fall into decay? Because though our social and political life is far from being perfect, there is a real recognition of God and some reverence for His

law, and this makes possible a large peaceful communion between man and man. Society is protected by spiritual forces that are stronger than visible bonds or material walls.

(4) The Christian religion is not a revolutionary attempt to sweep away all barriers and abolish all distinctions, but in its nature it is spiritual, diffusing itself as an atmosphere and refusing to be confined within the limits of any "chosen people." In connection with the various churches there has been much wall-building; a needful operation at times, but not the highest order of architecture. Some minds are easily provoked to build a separating wall. If, however, any church could succeed in making itself absolutely a sect, cutting itself off completely from the large universal currents of life, it would die; its strong wall would enclose not a living city but a silent tomb. The church can open wide her gates just in so far as she possess the fearless expansive life which comes from the indwelling God.

(5) In our personal life largeness and freedom is possible if we carry within and around us the fire that is kindled by the life and love of God. Our Lord broke down sectarian hedges, ignored conventional walls and took the whole of life as His domain because He incarnated perfectly the purity and peace, the conscience and charity of the soul that is absolutely loyal to God.

THE PROPHET AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS.

"And his disciples asked him saying, Why then say the scribes that Elijah must first come? And he answered and said, Elijah indeed cometh and shall restore all things; but I say unto you that Elijah is come already, and they knew him not, but did unto him whatsoever they listed. Even so shall the Son of man also suffer of them. Then understood the disciples that he spoke unto them of John the Baptist."—Matthew xvii., 10-13.

CHAPTER XXV

THE PROPHET AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS

(MALACHI.)

Except from this book we do not know anything of a prophet named "Malachi," and indeed we cannot be sure that the word is a personal name, it may mean "My messenger," or according to another reading "His messenger."

The suggestion that the face of the great scribe Ezra is hidden behind this veil is an old but quite unreliable conjecture. The book is simply a fragment of prophetic literature from the dull, depressing days between the first attempt to rebuild the temple and the reformation carried out by Ezra and Nehemiah, that is about the end of the fifth century B. C. It may be regarded as a part of the preparation for the movement which took place under those two great men half a century later. In so far as it touches these matters it seems to come in between the Deuteronomic demands and the final Levitical arrangements of the Jewish church.

The prophets were always dealing with social problems in this sense, that they stood and worked amid the great currents of their nation's life, they addressed the community, demanding in the name of God social purity and civic righteousness. But

the word "problem" has a special appropriateness here because there is a scholastic air of discussion about this book that we do not find in the earlier prophetic literature. The matters dealt with are set forth in the form of questions; it is a process of reasoning and lecturing unlike the passionate poetic appeals of the great prophets. The presentation is quite prosaic; there are bright flashes here and there, but there is no swift movement or mighty swing in the style. The short sermons are preached on texts which are introduced by the words "Ye say," or "Yet say ye." The reasoning shows that the writer lives in the days of an advanced creed though he himself is not a great theologian. Let us be thankful that the power of useful ministry is not confined to a few men in the first rank of genius; to men of more limited powers God gives desire, capacity, and inspiration for helpful service.

Especially do we need to be grateful for those who kept alive the good traditions and handed down the sacred Scriptures in dull, prosaic days. We can not live all the time at fever heat of excitement and expectation; we cannot have for every day high poetic oratory concerning the beauty of Zion, and the imminence of the great deliverance. We cannot always be listening to the thunder roll of tremendous denunciations. There are days when the supreme duty is to watch quietly and wait patiently, struggling in the meantime against shallow scepticism and sordid selfishness. At such a time the present seems very poor as it does in this book, men feel that it is only a dull space between the

glorious past and a brighter future. "Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto Jehovah, as in the days of old, and as in ancient years." Thus the writer stands between a great past and a still greater future. He sees great truths, such as the universal dominion of the changeless God, and the fatherhood of God as a sublime fact which has a real bearing on social life. He has faith that upon those who truly fear Jehovah's name "the sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings." He knows that there must be "a day of Jehovah," a judgment so destructive that it shall leave of the proud and the workers of wickedness "neither root nor branch," as well as a chastisement of the church that shall purify it for nobler service. And yet with all these bright gleams we feel that the whole piece moves in a depressing atmosphere and is touched by a despondent tone.

As to the foreign outlook, we find no general reference; the wide sweep of Amos, Isaiah or Ezekiel is absent and we have one short solitary allusion to Edom. That Jacob is preferred to Esau has received another and a recent illustration. The Edomites lift themselves up proudly in the day of disaster, but the prophet declares that their habitation shall be thrown down and their land branded as "The border of wickedness." This proves that Jehovah is great beyond the borders of Israel. In contrast with such severe punishment and complete destruction, the men of Judah should see in their own destiny a token of patient love. Though there may be some tinge of local jealousy in the form in

which the truth is here expressed, the sense of superiority, the conviction of higher privilege, was well founded and finds historical justification.

I.—THE PROBLEM OF SACRIFICE (1: 6-14).

In this passage we have a great faith shining out in the midst of petty local difficulties; Judah's God is the universal lord; wherever true sweet worship is offered it is offered to Him, and yet within the borders of the chosen people the name of God is profaned and the table of Jehovah polluted. The offerings presented are mean and shabby, worship is reduced to a miserable task to be shirked, or discharged with as little trouble as possible. In the service which ought to be the noblest expression of the soul's devotion there is no dignity, not even common decency. An offering that men would be afraid to present to the local governor is considered fit for the Lord of heaven and earth. A closed temple and an empty altar might have some real significance and pathetic suggestion; anything would be better than this wretched trifling. The priests are careless and the laymen deceitful. Public worship might possess social joy or ecclesiastical dignity, in this case there was neither vigorous spontaneity nor scrupulous regulation. What is more useless than worship that is neither acceptable to God nor inspiring to men? There have been times in Israel when men have attached a worthy significance to "sacrifice"; here the word has no meaning and the thing no power. There is certainly great need for the Christ to come with his new commandment of love. Men must be

taught in nobler ways the meaning of God's love and man's response. When men have lost hope and enthusiasm it is hard to shame them into decency or reason them into reverence. A new vision of the eternal Love is needed to inspire the spirit of self-surrender which leads men to give their substance and devote their energies to real religious service.

II.—THE PROBLEM OF PRIESTLY SERVICE (II: 1-10).

The next passage is in the same strain, but its attack is directed specially against the priests on account of their unfaithfulness. Surely the priests, representatives of God and leaders of men, should be loyal and obedient. This is the ideal, "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of Jehovah of hosts." Our author regards this ideal as having been more fully realized in ancient times; "The law of truth was in his mouth and unrighteousness was not found in his lips; he walked with Me in peace and uprightness and did turn many away from iniquity." Now it is different; the priestly class merit a curse and shall be put to shame; their teaching has been crooked and they have shown partiality in the administration of the law. The men who treat a sacred profession as a means of personal gain, and show selfish favoritism shall surely be made "contemptible and base before all the people."

III.—THE PROBLEM OF SOCIAL ORDER.

This concerns first the life of the family, and

second, the church and society in general (ii: 10-16, ii: 17, iii: 6). In the first of these two sections we have a powerful polemic against foreign marriages, and looseness in regard to the sacredness of family life. Loyalty of men to each other within Israel is based on the fatherhood of the one God who created all. Side by side with this statement, which begins to have a suggestion of universality, there is an intensely exclusive spirit. The foreign woman is spoken of as "the daughter of a strange god." At that time it was necessary that purity of blood and strictness of religion should be preserved. To us it is more important to note the emphasis laid on the sacredness of the wedding bond, and how near the writer comes to the New Testament position in this particular. Marriage is not a matter of personal caprice or temporary convenience; it is a sacred tie, "because Jehovah hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth." Marriage is meant to be the basis of family life, the children are "seed of God," through them the nation is to be preserved and the church kept alive. Jehovah hates divorce. The tears of wronged women cry to heaven for vengeance. The man who deals treacherously with the woman who has given herself to him shall be smitten with a curse. The nation that treats marriage as a trivial thing is weakening the very foundation of social order and family blessedness. Through many obscurities of text this truth shines clearly and it is important in all times and countries.

This evil is playing havoc in society and yet there are those who weary God with their com-

plaints, complaints that are the simple expression of blindness and stupidity. Through the very mischief that is wrought, God is judging men and showing the righteousness of His law, and yet they say, "Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of Jehovah and He delighteth in them; or where is the God of judgment?" Surely this is lack of insight, scepticism of the worst kind. If they cry for judgment, judgment they shall have, but no superficial, one-sided process. Let us remember when we appeal to heaven's bar that this is no light thing. "Who may abide the day of His coming?" The judgment will be wide in its range; it will strike both priests and people; its mission will be to punish and purify. To the temple and the market, to the court of justice and the home, the messenger of judgment will come. "He is like a refiner's fire." But after the dreadful visitation there shall be purity and peace once more. "Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto Jehovah as in the days of old, and as in ancient years."

IV.—THE PROBLEM OF CHURCH SUPPORT (III: 7-12).

After this noble prophecy, which would be a fitting climax to any sermon, we come back to the consideration of "ordinances" in a narrower sense. In answer to the startling question, "Will a man rob God?" we are told that the whole nation has robbed God in the matter of tithes and offerings. On this account the land is cursed with barrenness. If men will be generous towards God, He will pour upon them rich store of blessing. "And all nations shall call you happy; for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith Jehovah of hosts." The form of the

statement is intensely Jewish, but there is a truth in it that can be translated into higher forms. Remembering the strong words that have gone before, we cannot say that this writer is forgetful of the weightier matters of the law in his zeal for the tithe. But those who are interested in church organizations must guard against the danger of worshipping the mechanism even after the spirit has gone out of it. On the other hand the church has a body which must be cared for; God is gracious and truth is free, but spiritual ideas must embody themselves in institutions suited for the times. This calls for generous gifts of time, energy and substance. If a man is to receive blessing from the Temple he must give himself to it; spiritual blessings cannot be bought or sold in the world's market, neither can the fulness of blessing find its way into a narrow, greedy heart. Jesus Christ lifts all these subjects to a higher plane with His great word, "He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it."

V.—THE PROBLEM OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE.

(iii. 13; iv. 3.)

Here we have reflected the despondent sceptical tone which prevailed at that time, quenching enthusiasm and paralyzing effort. There were those who went so far as to say that "It is vain to serve God," and we cannot wonder when we consider their conception of this service. When religion becomes a mere mourning apparel, put on for the sake of profit, there is nothing in it to create joy and strength. The temptation to "call the proud hap-

py" may beset a strong man in the hour of darkness; the seventy-third Psalm shows us how that battle may be fought and won. But even in those dark days there were men of real religious experience, that is, men to whom the fear of God was the beginning of wisdom and the basis of life. Such reverence, not a superficial solemnity, is the real root of religion. That reverence is also the basis of truest friendship and sweetest fellowship. That is the real church, the fellowship of those who fear God, respect themselves and care for each other. On that church God looks down with interest; He keeps its records, and in the terrible day when pride is humbled and falsehood put to shame Jehovah will spare and cherish His own. Here is a flash of glorious light struggling to shine through the thick darkness. From the side of the formalist religious life is a mere pretence, to the man of real godliness it is a pure satisfaction, to the eye of God there is in it the promise of eternal life.

VI.—THE PROBLEM OF FUTURE MINISTRY (IV: 4-6).

The answer to scepticism will be judgment. When the day comes burning like a furnace the dullest will be able to see, and these shallow grumblers will be driven to revise their estimate of life. But before that a minister is needed to prepare for the great day by bringing order and peace into family life. For this purpose God will send again the great prophet Elijah to work with restless energy and speak with convincing power. This closing paragraph represents well the spirit of the

whole book; remember Moses, look for Elijah, this is the exhortation and it implies a certain high faith in the past and the future, combined with a despondent tone as to the present. The prophet rightly reflects his age, and such was the prevalent spirit; men clung to the glorious memory of the past and they cherished hopes of better things to come, but on the whole they felt as if their own day was a dead, God-forsaken time. The men of that age therefore deserve thanks for holding fast when the atmosphere was damp and chill. Their faith has been justified in larger measure than they ever dreamed; many greater than Elijah have been sent by the Eternal God, and by the ministry of Jesus Elijahs will continue to be multiplied, the church will not lack strong, bold men, who are ready to speak the truth in fearless fashion, and who by preaching peace will prepare for judgment and turn away the curse.

A PROPHET'S PROTEST AGAINST SMALLNESS

"We should fancy that Jonah's portrait as he sat under his withered gourd was not a thing of beauty, or a joy forever."—Spurgeon.

"This apparently trivial book is one of the deepest and grandest that was ever written, and I should like to say to every one who approaches it, 'Take off thy shoes, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.' In this book Israelitic prophecy quits the scene of battle as victor, and as victor in its severest struggle—that against self. In it the prophecy of Israel succeeded, as Jeremiah expresses it in a remarkable and well-known passage, in freeing the precious from the vile and finding its better self again."—"The Prophets of Israel," by Prof. C. H. Cornill, page 170.

CHAPTER XXVI

A PROPHET'S PROTEST AGAINST SMALLNESS

Some of the most competent and enthusiastic expositors of this wonderful book complain bitterly of the treatment it has received both from the world in general and the Church in particular. The tragedy of the book, they tell us, is this, that a picturesque piece of literature throbbing all through with the warmest life has been so often handled in a shallow, controversial spirit, that a story so constructed as to carry from beginning to end a great spiritual truth, an important practical lesson, has been covered with the dust of a barren controversy. Such a controversy cannot be altogether avoided, and there is no doubt much to be learned from the discussions that have gathered round this book; still we believe that the statement is substantially true, the book of Jonah has suffered from the very thing against which its original protest was made namely, narrowness of view. It is not simply that men have differed in their interpretation of it; such difference may be healthful and stimulating; but it is this, that under the idea of "defending" the narrative it has so often been maintained that only one view was possible, that only on that one view has the book

any reality and value. It is not the purpose of the present exposition to discuss in detail these different views, but rather to lay stress upon the great lesson which the book enshrines in such a striking form. In other words our task is here, as all through the present volume, positive and constructive. If the truths we thus discover and develop are not new they are at least in danger of being neglected, and they need bold emphasis to-day, for the battle which the noble life must fight against narrowness is the same in substance though the form is ever changing. One remark, however, must be made with regard to this controversy whether the narrative is literal history or a poetic story whose main purpose is to teach a great lesson. Even this, that the expositors who accept the latter view have not been driven to that position by arguments against the possibility of miracles or by vulgar ridicule poured upon the incident of "the great fish." That kind of "negative criticism" spent itself in vain against the faith of men who felt that in this book there was something of priceless value and everlasting use. In the case of thoughtful Christian men a change in their explanation of this particular book is not a thing that stands alone, it is part of a larger movement involving what they regard as a clearer view of the upward course of revelation, and a more correct and sympathetic appreciation of the varied forms of Hebrew literature through which that revelation comes to us. Such change as this implies a wide range of reading and much keen, careful thinking; it is in fact a process which can scarcely have full justice done to it by those who have never

passed through it. The result at any rate is the conviction that Old Testament literature has assumed a great variety of forms and that the student will be richly repaid who makes a conscientious effort to place himself in the position of the ancient historian, poet or prophet. He will find the same great truth expressed in sermon or song, prophecy or prayer, and the vital fundamental character of the truth is seen in the very variety of expression which it craves and creates.

The first thing then for a student to do in connection with this book is to treat it as he would treat a great picture, that is, take a good look at it, as a whole, so that all its parts may be seen in their proper place and proportion. Whatever view of the book we may take it is not right to seize a minor incident, place it in the foreground, and discuss that to the neglect of everything else. When we take a full sympathetic view of the whole picture, even from the English version, we can gain the impression that this short story shows marvelous powers of vivid description and picturesque presentation. There is dramatic power, we are taken into a real world, we are seized by a living movement; the man who is put before us as the chief figure is shown as faithless in his foolish flight from the presence of God, reluctant in his discharge of duty, and petulant as he sits and waits for the unfolding of destiny. To attempt to paraphrase such a story would be to gild refined gold. Let each reader give a quiet half hour to the study of the picture sketched by one who was both an artist and a prophet. Thus, when we gain the proper perspective we see that

the protest against littleness, the stinging satire against smallness is the main thing, it is through this that God rebukes our narrow bigotry and petulant pride.

We are warned against a small idea of a prophet. The man who wrote these words was a prophet in the deepest sense. "And Jehovah said, Thou hast had pity on the gourd for which thou hast not laboured neither madest it grow; which came up in a night and perished in a night; and should not I have pity on Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six-score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?" Yes, the divine pity and tenderness that breathe through these words manifest the real prophetic spirit, the spirit, that is, of the man who has learned that loyalty to God and love to men are the two sides of the same religious life. The author of the book is indeed a prophet but his Jonah is a small creature who, on his own confession, makes his personal comfort and reputation the supreme consideration. A prophet is a man who looks out upon the world from the standpoint of God and humanity; he never allows self-interest and selfish ease to loom so large upon his horizon that all other needs and demands are hidden. How does Jonah stand this test? He flees from duty because a merciful God in answer to penitent prayer will avert the doom which he has predicted, and so his reputation for clear foresight and accurate calculation will be damaged, or his claim to be a God-sent messenger will be rendered null and void. This is the sophistry of a small soul! Further,

when he has delivered his message he goes outside the city, makes himself comfortable and sits down to wait and "see what would become of the city." What does he care what becomes of it so long as the reputation of Jonah the great prophet is not injured? Seated there he manifested the same smallness of spirit; the gourd had no living relation to him, he had not spent any thoughtful care or loving sympathy upon it, but it suited his convenience, it was a good umbrella; when it was taken away and he lost its pleasant shade, he was hot and uncomfortable and wished that he might die; he thought that he did well to be angry with God and all the world. Very far was he from the spirit of resignation manifested in the words—

> "Jehovah gave, Jehovah takes away;
> Jehovah's name be blessed."
>
> (Job i. 21.)

These words express the submission of the pious man who struggles hard to maintain his faith, even when life seems hopeless. Jonah under a trifling loss believes that all things in heaven and earth conspire against his comfort. This is not the ideal of a true prophet; it is rather an early form of the Pharisee, and it would not have been sketched in this vivid fashion, if there had not been good men who were in danger of having their life blighted by such narrowness.

We are warned against a small idea of truth. What is the true fulfilment of prophecy? Is it not that it should enter into the life of man and become an effectual force for righteousness? The saying

of an ancient expositor that prophecy is given not to be fulfilled but that it may not be fulfilled suits this case; even if it cannot be applied universally, it represents the position of the true prophet who preaches judgment in the hope that mercy may follow. That which burdened the heart of the great prophets was not the thought that the mercy of God might put to shame their predictions of doom, but rather the fact that the people would not place themselves in the condition which made it possible for a righteous God to be merciful. If in the spirit of sympathy a preacher tells a young man that he is going to darkness and destruction, and if the word by its tone and truth arrests the attention and quickens the conscience of that young man so that he turns his face toward the light of heaven, and the love of Jesus, is not the prophecy fulfilled? Yes, it is fulfilled in the truest, noblest sense, it has entered into the young man's life and through him it will enter into the human life in which he shares.

If the word remains outside of the man it is fulfilled in a different sense; when mercy is repeatedly rejected, judgment goes unchecked to its final result; but the Cross as a sacred symbol, speaks to us of all the love and care which constantly seeks to save men from destruction by turning them from sin.

If the truth thus suggested is embodied in a typical case and not merely in the life of an individual, it is none the less true. To think that truth concerns only particular facts is a small idea of truth. The touching parable of the Prodigal Son is not to be lightly swept aside as "fiction" because we cannot prove that it referred to some definite youth

in Jerusalem or Nazareth; it is much more than a personal photograph; it is a symbol of the life of humanity, and in it many wandering souls have found their own experience mirrored. If you saw a man broken down under the weight of conviction brought to a deeper sense of sin by the ministry of that incomparable parable, you could surely never be guilty of such stupidity as to suggest that he is allowing his mind to be distressed and his heart to be tormented by an imaginary picture. Centuries ago a great Greek thinker taught that poetry is truer than history; and at the present stage of our experience it ought to be a common-place saying that there are some kinds of "fiction" that are truer than truth, that is, they bring us nearer to the heart of things, to the vision of real life than a crude collection of facts can possibly do. The highest work of imagination is not to invent artificial, grotesque combinations of thoughts or things but to unveil the hidden springs of life, and to show the real relations of the spiritual kingdom. The evil is not that truth should come to us in varied forms, prosaic and poetic, personal and typical; if we really grasp the great idea, the living principle, the exact form of its embodiment is a subordinate consideration; but it is an evil that we are so often not seeking the truth at all but want support for our prejudice or stimulus for our pleasure, and that so many can take pleasure in low ideals and false views of life.

We need further to take the warning against a small idea of history. Let us not despise facts, or we shall become vain dreamers; in science the accuracy of observation and in history the faithfulness

of the recital are of supreme importance. But in the realm of ideas and beliefs we cannot apply mathematical measures, and statistical reports. A mathematical formula has its own value, a strict record of particular transactions may be of the highest importance but the world is large and life is subtle so that there are other valuable forms of expression and testimony. Hence there is more than one kind of history. We have, at the present time, no controversy with the man who maintains that this book is a literal record of fact, that every feature of the description had its corresponding event in the world of sense, but we are opposing with all the weight of legitimate argument the man who says that if such view is denied the historical value of the book is lost. There are many kinds of history. At one time people of our own race were content to regard history as a list of battles, a record of extraordinary events, a series of royal biographies, or something of that kind, now we know that the successful historian is the man who reproduces the life and makes us realize the ruling forces of a given period. This requires something of philosophic insight and artistic creative genius, it is a difficult thing to do and is never perfectly done.

Two kinds of history we need to mention for our present purpose, the history of a soul, and the history of a truth. A comprehensive view of this book convinces us that the writer's main concern is with the inward life of Jonah. If he meant to write the history of an actual expedition to Nineveh his narrative has many missing links, there are many interesting questions of detail that he has left unanswered

but if he meant to give us the picture of the man's spiritual life, and to show what Jonah's idea of prophecy was, and how a man with such an idea must look up to God and out upon the world, how the false selfish point of view must warp the whole life and degrade the temper—then he has succeeded perfectly. With wonderful skill our author has arranged all the material at his command so as to make it reflect the strongest light upon the character and career of the chief figure. Only when he accepts his fate and surrenders himself to the storm with these words "I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you," only then does Jonah attain to the slightest semblance of dignity and submission; everything else is coloured by his narrowness of temper and his false view of the prophetic function. When this is patiently pondered, it will be seen that the really prominent thing is the history of the soul that allows itself to be cramped by the influence of a narrow bigoted selfishness.

Further there is such a thing as the history of an idea, the growth of a great truth, and this history is of great significance.* We know that the very battles which were necessary to prevent the Hebrew religion from being crushed by foreign influence, or dragged down by popular superstition tended to beget, along with strength of character, an exclusive spirit and a harsh temper. For the time exclusiveness was necessary in order to preserve the spiritual treasure which in the providence of God was meant for all mankind. But there was danger in the situation. Small men were

*See Chapter XXI.

led to consider the exclusiveness as the essence of the religion, and to think that the great truths they had received were a perpetual monopoly for their own race. It was quite natural for the average man to drift into this position, for it is always easy to mistake the temporary circumstance for the eternal principle. Hence it was at the time when the cycle of prophecy was about complete, and the revelation given to Israel had reached the point when it became both by its loftiness and its incompleteness an anticipation of the Christian faith; it was then that the hardest crust gathered around it and certain of its defenders showed that it was possible to be jealous guardians of "the law and the prophets" without possessing the discrimination and spirituality of the true prophet. This tendency grew and became so strong that it was the bitterest enemy our Lord had to meet. The narrow spirit of Judaism so blinded the minds and hardened the hearts of its leading representatives that they could not recognize the true King. They honored the memory of prophets whom their fathers had persecuted and they themselves slew the greatest prophet that God ever gave to this world.

But on the other hand, there were those who saw, even if imperfectly, that the knowledge of the true God meant responsibility as well as privilege, that Israel's election was an election to service, that vengeance upon the heathen could not be all that was in the heart of a merciful righteous God.* These men valued highly the peculiar privilege of their nation and their Church, but gifted with spir-

*See Chapter XXI.

itual insight and true human sympathies they had a purer and larger idea of Israel's mission. These two tendencies struggled together within the bosom of the same religion, the narrow national thought conquered to this extent that it nailed the Son of man to the cross; but in that seeming conquest it met defeat, for by the disciples of the new faith the broad universal spirit receives its highest expression and with the cry "Jesus and the resurrection" the religion was born that refuses to recognize any barrier of race or clan. The book of Jonah is part of the history of that great movement, it has an intrinsic beauty and attraction, and as part of a great spiritual conflict it is of permanent significance. If we look around and within we shall find the same conflict in process; the movement advances, God's purposes become clearer but still in a real sense each community and each soul must fight the battle anew. If in the picture of Jonah we see ourselves in our small hours, when personal feeling and selfish considerations have played too large a part, we may learn that it is ridiculous as well as wicked to make self the centre of God's world, and to be so inflamed by vain self-conceit as to imagine that the divine purpose can be moulded to our personal convenience. Thus the book not only reveals the conflict of opposite views and hostile forces in the history of the chosen people but it lives to help us in the battle which goes on within our own souls, it bids us come out of a close, selfish atmosphere, and look at life in the light of eternity, so that we may sympathize more cordially with the mercy of God and the needs of men.

THE PROPHET OF JUDAISM—JOEL

"To Joel this world is a great drama; the history of humanity is a tragedy; this world is ruled and controlled by a holy righteous God; this world exists for the production of ethical, religious, eternal character; this world is being sculptured into a kingdom of holiness, righteousness, truth, goodness, and love. I do not care how many defects and ignorances there are; I do not care how much of weak personal feeling mingles in Joel's declaration of that faith; but I tell you what it is: All that is grand, and great, and heroic, and good in our world has grown out of faith in man's soul, often dark and obscure and ignorant—faith that this world belongs to God, is ruled by God, and shall at last be judged by God."—The late Dr. W. G. Elmslie, "Expository Lectures and Sermons," page 94.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE PROPHET OF JUDAISM—JOEL

This prophecy is of a different order from those we have found in the earlier books; the writer is rather a poet than a prophet, he addresses a small community, and the Temple is the centre of his world and the supreme object of his sympathy. Joel was evidently, according to his capacity, a man of noble spirit who had studied the earlier writings and who gladly places his literary gifts at the service of the church. In his writings we seem to reach a point where the prophet is beginning to give way to the theologian and the scribe. His carefully prepared sermon has a real significance, as a revelation of his faith, and as a document of that Jewish church which was now reaching its final stage of development. The small Jewish community, sheltered within the large frame-work of the Persian Empire, was free to devote itself exclusively to religious and ecclesiastical interests; its circumstances might be miserable, and its noblest life drawn largely from the past, but in these dull, prosaic days it was preserving a great treasure for the world and preparing for another heroic struggle. Before the Exile the prophet is a critic of the church, afterwards he becomes a comforter of a

struggling community, in Joel he appears as a churchman who devotes his patriotic fervour and prophetic fire to keep alive the flame of sacrifice upon the altar. In this position also real inspiration is possible, and a man of true prophetic spirit may catch the command, "Strengthen the things that remain that are ready to die." And yet it is worth while noting where the particular prophet places his emphasis, and the kind of dress that he considers appropriate for the clothing of his thoughts concerning God and the world. We have here, then, the poetic picture of a great calamity, the prophet's persuasive call to national penitence, the promise of acceptance and blessing which expands into a programme of final judgment.

The prophet's description and interpretation of the calamity has its special features. Doubtless a plague of locusts is a terrible event, bringing sadness and gloom upon the community, and the starting point of this prophecy is such a real historical incident, but surely the locust plague has once for all found its poet; Joel pictures with wonderful vividness the march of the devouring army; his presentation is realistic and yet is coloured by his peculiar theological idealism, the plague suggests if it does not actually symbolize a visitation of still larger significance.

"They leap upon the city; they run upon the wall;
They climb up into the houses; they enter in at the windows like a thief.
The earth quaketh before them; the heavens tremble;

The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining,
And Jehovah uttereth His voice before His army;
For His camp is very great;
For He is strong that executeth His word;
For the day of Jehovah is very great and terrible," etc.

Two powerful descriptions in which every word is suggestive and every stroke of the style tells its pitiful tale, culminate in the twofold exhortation, "Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the old men and all the inhabitants into the house of Jehovah your God, and cry unto Jehovah." "Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly, sanctify the congregation, assemble the old men, gather the children and those that suck the breasts; let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber and the bride out of her closet." The central position of the Temple is brought out in the way in which the loss of the means of sacrifice is regarded as the supreme and significant result of the great disaster. "Is not the meat cut off before our eyes, joy and gladness from the house of our God?" "Who knoweth whether he will not turn and repent, and leave a blessing behind him, even a meal offering and a drink offering to Jehovah your God?" What a strange contrast between this and the position of Isaiah when he stands and pours his fierce contempt upon the sacrifices that had ceased to be symbols of righteousness (i: 10 f). But Joel also sought righteousness in his own way; the circumstances are different, the whole point of view has changed.

Joel does not give a prominent position to the demand for deeper morality and nobler righteousness that is so characteristic of the prophetic preaching. His people are poor and to be pitied; he reserves his stern proclamation of vengeance for the outside world. If only there can be a real service of humiliation, when the whole community prostrates itself in sincere penitence before God, then all will be well. He does give a high place to the outward act, the church ceremony, but we cannot charge him with formalism in the face of that one magnificent word, "rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto Jehovah your God." But this much we can say, that in our preaching the ethical and spiritual drawn from the other prophets must play a larger part, lest we find ourselves with an elaborate organization and well supplied temple from which the life has slipped away. The duty of public humiliation or of united thanksgiving may still have its appropriate place, but these must be guarded against false views of religion, and narrow thoughts of God. Joel did his own work faithfully, but because we are taught in the school of Christ our whole system of thought and movement of life cannot revolve round one ecclesiastical idea.

To Joel "the day of Jehovah" is near, this terrible day seems to be coming in the plague of locusts, and when that calamity has passed and in answer to penitent prayer blessing is promised, "the day of Jehovah" is still near. The plague shall be removed, the land shall again prosper, all that has been taken away shall be restored. "Ye shall eat in plenty and

be satisfied, and shall praise the name of Jehovah your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you; and my people shall never be ashamed." Then follows the promise of the outpouring of the Spirit with its accompanying signs, and finally the last act of the great world-drama, when the nations shall be gathered into the valley of judgment, near Jerusalem, in order to receive due punishment for their offences against the chosen people. "But Judah shall abide forever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation." In this programme we may fairly say that the only ethical idea that is brought out clearly and vigorously is that the foreign nations shall be punished for their unjust violence, shameless greed, and unrelenting hatred toward Israel. This thought that God will avenge the nation's wrongs is an important one, but it may be held in a one-sided fashion. The promise of Israel's prosperity also lays stress on outward circumstance rather than inward character, "And it shall come to pass in that day that the mountains shall drop down sweet wine, and the hills shall flow down with milk," etc.

(1) It seems clear that the closing portion of the book is dominated by the strict exclusive Jewish spirit which condemns the world to destruction and reserves everlasting privileges for the Jews. "All flesh" upon whom the Spirit is poured, according to the context, and the general standpoint of the book, refers to the children of Israel. The apostle Peter, just before he was prepared for a wider view, says: "For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, *even* as

many as the Lord our God shall call unto Him." But we must not judge this exclusiveness unreasonably. By its very stiffness and sternness it did a good work in helping to preserve the purity of the Jewish religion against Samaritan superstition, Syrian persecution and the baser side of Greek influence. This, however, is only one side of a great question; the missionary hope also has its roots in the teaching of Old Testament prophets. Let us treat these messengers of God sympathetically, and at the same time cleanse our own minds from small sectarianism rather than waste our energies in denouncing the narrowness of men, who by God's grace builded better than they knew.*

(2) "The day of Jehovah" is a phrase that plays a great part in the teaching of the prophets from the time when Amos rescued it from popular degradation. In Joel it seems to be rather a theological conception, a part of a creed than an actual vision. All through he works from the belief that "the day of Jehovah" is near; in the first stage a chastisement on Israel calling for penitence and prayer; in the second a day of doom for the foreign foe. In the other prophets the working out of this idea occurs in connection with some real historical event which threatens the life or influences greatly the fortunes of Israel; here it is a general outlook into the future proceeding from the writer's religious beliefs. Its spiritual meaning is to some extent preserved in that it is preceded by a great act of humiliation, which makes prominent the ac-

*See Chapters XX, XXI, XXVI.

knowledgment that only by forgiveness and purification can even Israelites be prepared for the dreadful appearance of Jehovah's great day. It is just as possible now as in the olden times for men to talk glibly of "the day of the Lord," and glory in its nearness without realizing its awful significance. It is also possible for us to cling to a system of thought and form of words out of which all definite meaning and living power has gone. We must re-think the old sacred phrases and refresh our minds by finding out what they once meant and what they still symbolize.

(3) The prophet's programme has not been fulfilled in the exact form in which he presented it; nor do we expect that God will literally gather the nations into the neighbourhood of Jerusalem to wreck His vengeance upon them. About four centuries after this the Roman armies gathered round the ill-fated city; in spite of the resistance of noble patriots and fierce fanatics they succeeded in levelling its walls, capturing its citadel and desecrating its temple. Since then broken-hearted Judaism has suffered the scorn of a thoughtless, cruel world. And yet in a real sense the movement of history has justified the prophet's teaching. The judgment against the nations has worked itself out. The light trivial tribes have vanished, leaving hardly a trace behind. The great empires founded by force, and driven by selfish greed, have crumbled to pieces. The Oriental empires that were the most splendid specimens of earthly magnificence, have left the smallest legacy to humanity. To-day we all acknowledge the truth that Hebrew prophets saw so

clearly, and sometimes proclaimed so fiercely, namely this, that there is a judgment-day for nations; that sensuality, cruelty and greed not only injure the victims and outrage the law of heaven, they cause the life of the proud nation to become rotten at the core.

On the other side there has also been fulfilment. The Christian religion proved itself the true successor of ancient prophecy by the way in which it seized the eternal part and lifted it to fuller beauty and larger power. Jerusalem does in a very real sense abide forever and send forth a living message. It may be that in many forms Babylon is with us still, but the judgment of the wise and thoughtful is not bewildered or perverted by the glamour of worldly success. We can see that Judaism, even when it was defeated and disheartened, has preserved many truths and laws needful for the highest life of the world. And we can cherish the clear, strong conviction that the message of mercy, the evangel of love which finds its fullest expression in the suffering Christ, gives nobler meaning to prophetic hope and vindicates in even a larger way the eternal righteousness.

THE PROPHET'S CERTAINTY, OR THE CHANGING FORM AND THE ETERNAL LIFE

"The Revelation recorded in the Bible is a jewel which God has given us in a setting of human history. The love of God to His people now is the continuation of the love which He showed to our fathers; and Christianity, like all else that is of value in the spiritual possessions of mankind, is an inheritance the worth and permanence of which have been tried by the experiences of generations. Such treasures are not won without effort and battle. What is appropriated easily is as easily lost, and the abiding possessions of humanity consist of truths that have been knit and strengthened by long habit, and institutions that have been shaped and polished by the friction of practical use. A religion fit to be a part of actual life cannot be exempt from this law, and revelation itself has become a force in human conduct only by first becoming a factor in human history."—Robertson Smith's "The Prophets of Israel," Lecture I.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE PROPHET'S CERTAINTY, OR THE CHANGING FORM AND THE ETERNAL LIFE

(Haggai ii. 6-9; Hebrews xii. 27, 28.)

One of the most remarkable passages in that noble treatise called "the Epistle to the Hebrews," is an application and an adaptation to the writer's own time of a part of Haggai's prophecy; the Bible student will do well to place side by side the words of the prophet-preacher, and those of the Christian teacher. Thus we learn that though the external circumstances and spiritual atmosphere are different the real living faith is the same. In the days of Haggai the nation was only a small remnant, what the world calls "a miserable few," and the people looking back to the distant redemption under Moses, the heroic days of David, the peaceful, prosperous times of Solomon, were in danger of thinking that their golden days were all in the past, that the future could have nothing in store to be compared to the splendour of the ancient days. When men give too much way to that feeling, action is paralyzed; they spend their strength in vain regrets, lamenting the loss of "the good old times." This is not the attitude of faith, and God's messen-

ger can never be content with it; though he himself in his phrase "yet *once* more" may show trace of human limitations, he is so far in advance of the people that he can confidently declare the truth that the divine programme has never been completely realized, the future has still greater things to reveal, God has yet more light to break forth from His word. God will not only shake the earth as in the days of Moses, He will also shake the heavens. He will shake all nations; men will then recognize the meaning of this neglected impoverished Temple, and they will gladly minister to the life of the true Church. To understand this prophecy, its noble spirit, as well as its local limitations, we must remember the difficult but necessary work of church building which strained the efforts of the small Jewish community; then we can seize the essential spirit of the comforting message and show how in a Christian atmosphere it attains to a larger meaning and wider application. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, living in times of sudden change and fierce persecution, when all things seemed to be shaken, gained help and blessing from the words of the prophet Haggai. Thus the prophets of all ages are linked into one family; separated by large tracts of time, they form one company because they hold fast to the essential things of God's kingdom, in the spirit of faith in God and hope for the future of the Church. The circumstances of their lives, and the outward forms of their religion differ, but they have the same deep convictions, the same interpretation of the past, the same outlook into the future. They both see

that immense changes take place in the course of the world's life; thrones and kingdoms, nations and churches are moved by gradual change or violent convulsion. As our knowledge of the world's history is enlarged that fact becomes ever clearer; it does not now require keen perception or profound insight to see that change, slow or sudden, is the all-pervading fact. But that view, of itself, may beget scepticism and indeed has often had that effect. These two men are men of faith; while fully realizing the changefulness of life they see that there is a kingdom which cannot be shaken, a church which cannot be moved. The two examples of shaking to which they point are the same, though viewed from widely different standpoints; the giving of the law at Sinai, and the coming of the Christ. From the religious point of view, these are two of the most significant epochs in the world's history. When God delivered Israel from the Egyptian yoke and sent the Hebrew tribes into the wilderness to seek freedom and begin a higher life, that movement, small in itself, was the dawning of a larger life for mankind; and when more than a thousand years later the temple of Jerusalem was destroyed, and the Gospel went out on its great missionary career, that was a fuller and clearer manifestation of the same redeeming purpose. To many then living both periods seemed to be days of dark disorder and utter loss; it was only the men of strong faith who clearly recognized the fact that through it all God was working to bring to men a nobler vision of Himself, and a richer realization of His kingdom. Prophets and

apostles had their moments of weakness and weariness, but one principle was clear to them, to this one truth they were always loyal—Whatever changes may take place, whatever thrones may fall, whatever temples may perish or peoples be scattered, the true religion must live, and the love of the Eternal God must continue to be revealed. The things that are made, the temporary forms may be shaken, but the eternal purpose of redemption must stand out more clearly, and the love which radiates from the Cross must more and more light up this dark world.

We are often told that the present age is a time of great restlessness, that it is pre-eminently a transition period, that we are passing, in so many ways, from an old order that was known and definite to a new order which as yet only appears in dim, uncertain outline. True, but our age is not exceptional, we are only submitting to a constant law; the movement of change may be a little quicker now, but it is not confined to our own or any century. Change is the unchanging law of life; we must all recognize it and bow before it; it is only a part of life, but if we can see that though it often seems to be cruel, there is mercy at the heart of it, we may hail it in these jubilant tones:

"Rejoice that man is hurled
From change to change unceasingly,
His soul's wings never furled."

(Browning.)

Our great poets see this truth and preach to us loyal submission to this law.

"Meet is it changes should control
Our being, lest we rust in ease;
We all are changed by still degrees,
All but the basis of the soul."

"The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils Himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world."
(Tennyson.)

Change then is inseparable from life. Some men are fickle and fond of change, others cling with timid fear to the past. This is a matter of personal feeling, individual temperament, but we must all try to understand the significance of life's restless movement and learn that while change counts for much, it is not the whole story. The body is always changing, casting off its dead particles and gaining new substance, going forward in healthy growth until change begins to conquer and the balance inclines towards decay and death. The mind must ever be acquiring new thoughts and seeing the truth under new aspects; those who seem to remain stagnant are really drifting backward, for here as elsewhere there is no such thing as standing still. In social life the same; your family is never the same many days together; babies leave behind their babyhood, the young grow out of their lightness and irresponsibility, they rise up to bear the burdens and fight the battles of life. National life cannot be marked out and limited by paper constitutions, or bound down by stereotyped forms; new forces emerge which

kings and statesmen may guide, to some extent, but which they cannot altogether control. There can only be two ways of viewing this perpetual change; one that it gives movement to and fro without end, and also without meaning; such a view is correctly called scepticism. The other is the view of faith, that it is a gradual unfolding of a divine plan which may be hindered or delayed by our weakness and wickedness, but which must march on to its final triumph, because it is a revelation of the eternal life of God. This glorious faith has been cherished and expressed by the prophets and saints of all ages; at times it has been manifested in simple and even rude forms, but such a vital principle under God's gracious guidance breaks down its early barriers and corrects its own childlike errors.

The breaking away of the Christian religion from Judaism was a tremendous crisis, one of the most tragic chapters in the religious history of the world. It is difficult for us to realize the intense pain of the needful process. We need not be surprised if even strong men were haunted by the fear that in such a great crash something of real value might be irrevocably lost. The writer of "the Epistle to the Hebrews" does not attempt to meet the case by ridiculing such fear, but he shows in a sympathetic spirit that when the Christian religion emerges from the hard shell of Judaism it does not leave behind any great truth or real force; it carries everything into a higher plane and into a clearer light. The Lord Jesus is not a destructive critic or revolutionary reformer, but one who brings in the new order by fulfilling the real purpose and highest

aim of the older forms of faith. His disciples were treated by their compatriots as men who had proved disloyal to Moses, and who had forsaken the law of God. They, however, can claim that they have only cast off the temporary and changeable, that they have found through Jesus Christ the faith of Abraham and the piety of Moses; that in their new Teacher the preaching of the prophets and the songs of Zion have found new meaning and richer power. The shaking has been very great, but nothing real or divine has been lost.

The Christian religion does not abolish the conflict between the old and the new; the same strife is still active, for we cannot set all men on precisely the same plane of life. There will always be diversity of operations from the same spirit, and that is the strength not the weakness of the Christian faith. The simple, sublime faith of Abraham, the symbolic ritual of the Jewish church, the bold, strong preaching of the prophets, the lofty theology of Paul, the glorious idealism of John; these appeal to varied classes, and the man of large heart and catholic mind can appreciate the beauty and significance of all. Just in so far as we feel the attraction, and understand the meaning of the Eternal Love manifested in the Son of man, shall we treat with proper sympathy all lower and preparatory forms of revelation. Thus shall we combine strength of conviction with breadth and tenderness of charity. The apostles did not make it their special business to denounce the old forms and the earlier faith, but they firmly resisted all attempts to enslave men and bar the pathway of

progress by the power of tradition. Their thinking took a positive constructive form; the new was cherished, not because of its novelty, but because it enshrined, as well as expanded, the old truth.

In the case of every new movement towards freedom and largeness of life, when the shaking has been great, the birth-pangs severe, men who posed as leaders of their fellows have cried out that the church would surely be destroyed, and in consequence religion would die. In a spirit of fear and with loud clamour, men have thrust forth reckless hands to save the ark of God. Let us remember in our times of panic that no outside attack can do so much harm as our sloth and unbelief; it is rather late in the day to imagine that religion can easily be killed or that God will fail to defend His truth in the day of battle. We must be ready to part with that which can really be shaken and destroyed, though the loss of some of these things may seem for a time to tear away part of our real self; through such seeming loss the unseen kingdom will advance to fuller revelation, and in our intellectual life we may learn that it is possible to take up our cross and follow the Christ into a larger world.

There are many devout people who are bewildered by advancing knowledge or thrown into panic by the keenness of present criticism. They fear that as he realizes the immensity of the universe man will be driven to confess his utter insignificance, and that then his mysticism, which magnifies the importance of the soul, will be rebuked, and religion thus stricken at the roots will die. If we

come to see that we have sprung from the dust, not by instantaneous command, but through a long, slow process, another blow will be struck at our spiritual conceit, and the life will go out of that noble cry, "I am poor and needy, but the Lord thinketh upon me." Or if we find that the Bible grew and attained its present wonderful form by processes which are very imperfectly represented by ancient tradition, then in the hour when the truth and beauty of this great literature is most fully and reasonably vindicated, we shall lose our faith in the inspiring guiding Spirit. Sometimes men from whom the church expects guidance stand up trembling and confess their fear that the battle is too fierce, the strain too hard; if we cannot have quietness they fear the people will go back and sit down under the shadow of some great and ancient authority, where they can have the rest which Protestantism does not give. Certainly there will always be found some foolish enough to commit spiritual suicide in a time of great strain, but while we may be sorry for that we must not look behind us. "Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward," is always God's word to the prophet. If our faith cannot stand the strain of changing forms it is weak and unworthy of the name of loyalty to the living God. In every century some have uttered the doleful prophecy that if the form of knowledge changes faith must surely die. Thank God, those were not the true prophets! One of the distinctive messages of real prophecy, a message that grew to clearness in dark, tragic hours, was this, that temples may perish and

creeds change but religion will not die. History vindicates the prophet though his contemporaries found him lacking in their particular kind of patriotism and piety. In spite of paltry fears, true religion has grown, knowledge and reverence have gone hand in hand to new victories.

The Old Testament is specially instructive from this point of view; one of its many missions is to show us a devout religious spirit working in and through a great variety of forms. We have the earlier forms of the Hebrew religion, when the father of the family or head of the tribe was king and priest. There is the sublime revelation given to Moses, involving the birth of a nation, and in simple forms the beginning of a religious movement which through processes of growth reaches its high destiny. The prophets are both conservatives and reformers; they fight against degeneration, and meet this danger in the only possible way by stimulating living progress. When we come to the Jewish religion in its final form, the Levitical system with its one central sanctuary and its all-embracing ritual, we find that though the religious life and institutions bear the marks of many a conflict, yet they have in large measure been transformed by the constant stream of lofty teaching which is the manifestation of a growing revelation. Prophet and priest often confronted each other as representatives of apparently opposite ideas and irreconcilable interests, but in the final product the influence of the best in both has been beautifully blended. Here as elsewhere, every stage of the

upward movement meant strife and loss to the individual life; it was the everlasting process, the ever-present mystery of gain through loss. Not by mere lapse of time, but by a living movement to which countless souls contributed their noblest spiritual treasure, "the fulness of time" was ushered in, and there came One who sums up many revelations in the words, "God is spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." Here we reach the true Temple mount; the air is clear, and the view is exceedingly large.

Every important epoch in the life of humanity and of the Church illustrates in a special manner this great law of life. When Luther with magnificent boldness and reverence declared afresh the everlasting truth that "the just shall live by faith," the official representatives of the dominant system declared that religion was attacked, the Church was in danger and must be defended by fire and sword. Now it is easy to see that though vested interests were assailed, old traditions superseded and vain superstitions swept away, even the fierce strife of those stormy times did not destroy any essential truth or cast discredit upon any vital element of the Christian faith. Luther with his union of reverence and boldness, his vindication of freedom and his sure instinct for the essential things is a fine specimen of the prophetic spirit acting under more modern conditions, and hence a noble example for us. It would have been well if that great movement could have been managed with less violence, but we must remember that

gentle efforts to reform the church from within had failed; God does not shake either earth or heaven without good reason.

The proof of the divinity and absoluteness of our religion is its capacity of constantly renewing its fires of love and enthusiasm at the Cross. In the eighteenth century men who boasted in their shallow scepticism, declared that it was no use wasting arguments over a dead cause. Christianity was dying of weakness and old age; it was a bloodless, withered system. As is now admitted, Bishop Butler was intellectually more than a match for men of that type, but the real reply was the faithful preaching of the love of God manifested in Jesus Christ; this under such leaders as Wesley and Whitefield created a new evangelistic missionary movement which has encircled the world with its message of love, and exerted a far-reaching influence in every sphere of thought and life.

The French Revolution, whose baleful fires cast a lurid light on the closing years of the same century, was one of the greatest shakings that the modern world has known. Many good men in different lands at first hailed the movement with joyful hope as the dawning of a new day of liberty and righteousness, but soon all but the boldest sympathizers shrank back in horror from the terrible excesses. They saw that it was one of the dark days of the Lord, a day of fire and blood. But even "The Reign of Terror" could not destroy any great truth. Some useful things were no doubt consumed in that burning of wood, hay and stubble,

but when violent passion has spent its force, it is seen that, though not the highest manifestation, God does work through the earthquake and the fire.

It is an appropriate conclusion to our consideration of the varied forms of prophetic teaching to dwell with special emphasis upon the fact that faith abides and grows through changing forms; to us this is a commonplace, but two things are worthy of emphasis in this connection: first, this is a truth that the ancient prophets had to learn in painful ways, and second, each reverent, believing man to-day must have it vivified and appropriated to his personal experience, and it may be in his case not without pain. Having tried then to expound and illustrate some of the great truths revealed to the ancient prophets, we may strive to hold in our own way this great conviction. There is a kingdom that cannot be shaken, a kingdom of truth and righteousness, of faith and love. Into that kingdom we may enter by personal submission to the real Saviour and King. This kingdom had great part of its preparation in the ministry of the prophets; it received its highest revelation in the Son of man; it is ever coming, and for its coming we make our daily prayer. That kingdom is not wedded to one form; in time it has had many forms and in eternity it will continue to create new forms. Its glory is that it works from within outwards, moulding for itself ever clearer, more adequate, and so more beautiful expression. Small kingdoms built up through earthly greed and selfish pride

will be shaken and shattered; "the day of the Lord" scatters all shams and unrealities, but this kingdom comes into fuller freedom through the fiercest judgments, and larger, sweeter significance grows into the old watchword, "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever."

CONCLUSION

THE ANCIENT PROPHET AND THE MODERN PREACHER

"But the ultimate fountain of the prophetic preaching is the passion to win men. This is the secret both of the pathos and the splendours of its style. To the Prophets preaching was no mere display, but a sore battle with the hard hearts of their contemporaries, in which the messenger of the Lord worked with the pity of his weakness upon him, at a supreme cost to himself and conscious that he must summon to his desperate task every resource of feeling and of art."—Dr. G. A. Smith, "Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament," page 281.

CHAPTER XXIX

CONCLUSION

THE ANCIENT PROPHET AND THE MODERN PREACHER

If the Christian minister is not in some deep sense a messenger of God there seems to be no special reason why he should survive in highly civilized communities. There was a time when all education was included in the formal circle of the Church's life, and the clergyman or priest was the chief or only teacher. By fierce revolution or slow development all that has been changed. The schoolmaster, the journalist, the novelist and many others have acquired a share in the teaching function, and to some it seems as if the preacher was to be driven into a corner, and that a very small corner. Indeed, there are not wanting voices to cry that it is time he was superannuated, and some even to suggest that it is an impertinence for mortal man to speak to his fellows concerning the deep things of God. More than ever do we need to realize the words of the great apostle, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us." If we would face this bold attack there must be strong conviction not only that we have a great revelation to expound, and a fair equipment for the handling of it, but also that we have a living vocation, and stand in the line of an

honourable succession, that this is as true to-day as in the supreme moment of Isaiah's great vision; the Eternal King needs men to speak for Him; men, it may be, to deliver an unpopular message, to provoke a deeper thoughtfulness, and to break up the stagnation into which all organized religion is prone to settle.

Here we have one point of contact between the modern preacher and the men who by God's grace guided the life of Israel to ever loftier heights. The great prophets were speakers rather than authors. It is in later times when prophecy is about to vanish that the literary aspects are more prominent. The difficulty to-day of understanding many of the prophetic writings springs from this fact, that they are not logically connected and carefully polished essays, but fragmentary remains of spoken discourse. The criticism to which these writings have been subjected during the past century has tended to place the predictive element in a more subordinate place by showing that the ancient prophets were in the fullest sense living men speaking to their own times. This is surely what we may hope to be, knowing that we possess a fuller light and may be quickened by the same spirit. We have to be teachers even as they were, and our teaching has to assume the form of preaching, that is, it is not the lecturer's scientific discussion of a given theme, or the brilliant product of the artistic essayist, it is teaching revolving round and radiating from a certain centre, that central point being the act of heralding the King, calling men to the Cross, beseeching them to be reconciled to God and declaring forgiveness to penitent

souls. Thus the preaching of Isaiah, his appeals, his predictions of approaching judgment stand all organically related to his central conception of the divine King; and so in the forefront of a New Testament book, which is unsurpassed for its variety of teaching and its penetrating application of Christian principles to individual and social life, we have the announcement, "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified." We hear very much now about "preaching to the times," and it is a very good phrase, if rightly construed, but no superficial sociology can meet the case.* If the mystic element falls out of our preaching, and we live upon the mere surface of things, we are as preachers dead men, and dead men can never raise the dead. If we are to face the present with real force we must hold fast to the great things of the past and cherish an inspiring view of the future. This is our wisdom and our life, as it was the spirit of the true prophet. Emerson speaking of "the wise man," said, "he needs no library, for he has not done thinking; no church, for he is a prophet." Alas, the difficulty with this wise man is the difficulty of finding him; he is a purely ideal conception. The One whom we recognize as the ideal of manhood was glad to use the great library of His people and content to sit with His lowly brethren in the church. The people whom we have to face do not claim in this sense to be wise; in their deeper moments they confess their ignorance and their need; they are willing to listen to a calm, clear voice

*See Chapter XIX.

which in natural tones and with the accent of conviction speaks to them of the deep things of man and the great things of God.

It would be easy to fill up our brief space with a bare catalogue of differences and similarities between the ancient prophet and modern preacher, but such a list would not be specially luminous, and it would be difficult to make it so without a larger sketch of the history of prophecy and a more searching examination of the various forms which it assumed during the long, painful development of Israel's religious life. One or two points of this kind must, however, be noted if we are not to lose ourselves in vague generalities.

The Hebrew prophet lived before the Christ and prepared the way for His coming. The relative imperfections of the prophet's message as well as the depth of the prophet's life was a prophecy of the Christian revelation, an inspiration toward it and a clearing the way for it. Still it would not be altogether correct to say that the prophet looked forward while the preacher looks backward. That is a crude contrast, which if taken too literally becomes false. Though we have much greater things behind us, our look must still be towards the future. We still need insight and foresight. Our Lord's atonement is not simply "a finished work"; it is the divine fire of self-sacrifice which ever renews itself. His life is not a mere memory, but a perennial ideal. His teaching is full of startling suggestions rather than smooth, complete dogmas. Though we have so much to interpret and apply we must not become mere theological lawyers. Our religion is living

revelation, not dead history, and it presses eagerly forward to richer fulfilment.

The original prophets were the creators of the Church in the spiritual sense, and they were led by slow stages to ever clearer views of its true nature, until, in Jeremiah's doctrine of the new covenant, we have an anticipation of the deep individual experience which, in the Christian Church, should be combined with the purest social communion. We live in the Church, which is separate from the State; it is highly organized; in fact, we are sometimes tempted to think there is too much organization. We are swallowed up in the organization, and are in danger of becoming slaves to mere routine, for we are expected to have a message twice every Sunday and several times during the week. Yet most of us will do well to fight the unceasing battle against a mechanical, materialistic religion within the Church rather than raise a standard of revolt in the name of freedom and individualism, thus proving that we have mistaken eccentricity for inspiration.

The ancient prophet was more national in his position and outlook; in his case religion and patriotism were two sides of the same life. We need to get back to that condition with a difference. The Old Testament has still a large ministry to exercise in this particular. The prophets taught with mighty power and richness of ethical application the brotherhood of men, even if it was the brotherhood of Israelitish men. To them the social sins which sapped the life of the State were not simply political blunders or ordinary manifestations of selfishness; they were acts of treason against the Eternal King.

The prophets' treatment of social questions may be to us a tonic which will save us from a shallow individualism and a spurious evangelism. We must learn to unite in a living whole the individualism of Jeremiah and Paul with the civic consciousness and conscience of Amos and Isaiah.

There is still a deeper difference; we cannot rid ourselves of the feeling that there is something unique in the position and power of the ancient prophet, so that when we are applying the name to our noblest men we are using it in a secondary sense. That point will bear much investigation, but this uniqueness seems in part to consist in the fact that they were divinely appointed interpreters of a nation's destiny and guides of its life until by a wonderful providence an insignificant Semitic tribe became the "servant of Jehovah," a nation with a religious vocation, a missionary hope, and a message of permanent and universal significance. This also is "a finished work," the product of a special providence which "shall be to the Lord for a name, an everlasting sign which shall not be cut off." We cannot aspire to that precise position and yet it seems sometimes as if our reformers and noblest leaders have come very near to it when they rediscovered the Bible and applied to the enfranchisement of nations those great truths concerning God's righteousness, man's responsibility and the spirituality of religion. While this unique position can be claimed for the noblest prophets who united the highest poetic genius with the purest religious passion, it shades off by almost imperceptible degrees into the broader prophetic life which we by divine

grace may hope to share, and it is mere mental analysis which cuts it out and makes it the subject of separate contemplation.

There is another feature of the prophetic life which we must not neglect. The prophet was an intercessor, a representative of men in the presence of God as well as a messenger from God to men. Hungry, helpless men turned to him with the cry, "Pray for us." The sublime fact of intercession finds its highest fulfilment in the mediation of Jesus Christ, so that the lofty monotheism of the Hebrew prophets being translated into Christian language reads thus: "There is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." This also was in some measure anticipated in the life of the prophet. The Psalms are prophetic and it has been well said that if in the prophetic writings God is speaking to man, in the Psalms man speaks to God. Intercession is to-day the privilege of every true believer who has appropriated the great sacrifice and come into living fellowship with the High Priest. But those whom He has counted worthy and called into the holy ministry have in a special manner to keep this truth alive. Sometimes it seems more difficult to speak to God for men than it is to speak to men for God, and it may be that we feel here more deeply our dependence on the Divine Spirit. What a solemn task is this, not only to plead in general terms for "all sorts and conditions of men," but to enter intimately into the life of our people, to express with reverent reserve and tender delicacy their sins and sorrows, their needs and hopes, their deepest desires,

most pathetic pleadings and noblest aspirations. Only when we cast ourselves upon the Holy Spirit and faithful worshippers kindle around us the atmosphere of prayer can this high duty be rightly discharged. But if this is attained real preaching is possible and it will have some touch of prophetic power.

Let us rejoice, then, that we may still possess the prophetic faith and cultivate the prophetic qualities. Some may think that this is dangerous counsel, seeing that the prophets were in so many cases unpopular men, and had often in bitterness of soul to commend themselves to God and the future time. This does not necessarily mean that a man cannot possibly be a noble man, a clear thinker, and at the same time a popular preacher. Let us be thankful that in our day such a rash inference is contradicted by many brilliant examples. Still it is probable that if mere popularity is sought it is more likely to be gained by qualifications which the prophets did not cultivate, namely, the ability to express the average belief in bold, brilliant style, which makes up in dogmatic assertion what is lacking in intellectual clearness and moral depth.

The prophet's faith is in the reign of a righteous God and the undying nature of religion. The political order might fail and ecclesiastical systems might fall to pieces, but God would manifest Himself and faith would abide. This was the prophet's faith, a faith which sometimes brought upon him the charge of unbelief and want of patriotism. These truths must still be convictions of faith and not mere mat-

ters of tradition. Each generation must see them and appropriate them afresh in its own way. Our formal creed may be larger and more minute, and yet we may lack the breadth, simplicity, and strength of the prophet's faith in God. It would cure both a narrow dogmatism and a belated ritualism to come into closer contact with those strong men who fought so nobly the shallow infidelity and the sensuous ceremonialism of their own time. If we are to have a living pulpit the old faith must live with the new science, and the puritanism of the prophets must be chastened by the gentleness of the Christ; the teacher must speak out of a living experience, and not simply from the learning of the schools; mere professionalism must be conquered by the strength of the man who can say, "We also believe and therefore speak."

The prophetic qualities are insight, constancy and courage, and surely these are needed as much as ever. Insight, to see God in our own souls, and behind the ever-increasing wonder of the world; to see deep into the life of our own time, to sorrow over the weakness of the Church as well as to rejoice in her strength and beauty, to see the dangers of popular movements as well as their advantages, to see these things clearly and in right proportions, to speak of them not in harsh, cynical tones, but with tender, hopeful sympathy—this the Church now needs and demands from her prophets. Constancy to hold fast to our message when we have found it true and appropriate, to test it in various lights and apply it in different circumstances. To move on

with unswerving perseverance when reward is small and applause silent, when our noblest thought is misinterpreted and our best effort is misunderstood; to accept it as our reward that we have led some to see that their little world is not exactly God's great universe and that the measurements of the spiritual world are very high and very deep; in other words, to make religion purer and more thoughtful is the aim of the true teacher. This demands courage as well as constancy, courage to differ from the current standard, to refuse to bow down at the altar of average opinions, and make a god of shallow conventionality. It means to have boldness without impudence, sternness without censoriousness, authority without dogmatism, tenderness without effeminate gush. These are prophetic qualities still attainable by the man who lives near to God and lives for his fellow-men. The Church needs many gifts to minister to her varied life, but without prophetic men she cannot live at all in any valid sense; without men inspired and inspiring she declines into a mere machine, and a machine can never represent the living Christ. Her work is still to present a lofty thought of God, and to preach the religion of humanity, the religion of the Cross. The highest product of her life is not in splendid buildings or gorgeous ceremonies, but in the lives of men and women who recognize that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ moves through all spheres, and that self-sacrifice is the law of the highest life. We are thankful for all central truths that great thinkers have proved and poets sung, but a hungry

world demands that these treasures of eternal truth shall continually find fresh forms of speech and new manifestations in the lowly lives of faithful men. To this end work the ancient prophet and the modern preacher, and God never leaves Himself without a witness.

3 *Printed in the United States of America*

NORTH CENTRAL COLLEGE
224J76
C001
PROPHETIC IDEAS AND IDEALS CHICAGO
3 2611 00008269 9